between here and there

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between here and there

by hannigramized

Summary

Will's name is the last word Hannibal spoke in his presence. That was two months ago, directly after the fall, and Hannibal has not said a single word since.

Now Will has to navigate through their lives together without Hannibal's voice to guide him.

Notes

Title is from Sink, Florida, Sink by Against Me!

Edit March 2024: Thank you for all the new readers on this fic! Just a reminder that authors can see your public bookmarks, so please be kind. I've moved on from this fandom but that doesn't mean I'm open to criticism in my comments or bookmarks on this fic. Believe or not, rude comments on the sexualities of the characters in my fics is not appreciated. Also can someone tell me why this fic is getting attention after all this time 😭 Thank you all for your comments (when they're kind 🤨) and thank you to everyone who has recc'd this fic lately.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The last words Hannibal spoke in Will's presence were his name. He screamed it, in fact. Over the sound of waves crashing against rocks. Through the haze that surrounded Will's entire body, and made his senses dull, like the voice was trying to reach him through the water they previously left. Will could make out his own name being wailed into the night, but just barely. Like Hannibal's voice was still in the ocean, and never came out with the rest of him.

They had crawled across the beach to each other, having been separated when they hit the water, no matter how hard they tried to hold tight. They clasped hands on the rocky shore as soon as they were close enough.

Just before Will passed out, he heard Hannibal breathe out his name one last time.

That was two months ago.

Over the course of those two months, it wasn't difficult to overlook the fact that Hannibal wouldn't make a sound. Both of them were recovering from their injuries, and, more often than not, hopped up on too many painkillers to function. Will boiled it down to the fact that everything they could say to each other needed to be said with a clear head. It's why Will stayed quiet, too.

Except Will would sit in quiet conversation with Chiyoh while they sailed across the ocean. And Will would ask Hannibal how he was feeling some days. Hannibal would just shrug, or nod, or shake his head, or just flat out ignore Will.

Now, though, Will is beginning to realize that something is wrong.

They get off the boat after two months of convalescing in the safety of the cabin below deck. Away from anyone who may see them. They stay there for a bit longer after they reach the coast of France, not wanting to travel by land until they are certain they can get to another safe place—with clear minds, and healed wounds,and as much strength as they can possibly regain in the tiny space the boat allows. Hannibal doesn't speak the entire journey from the boat to their new house.

Chiyoh leaves them as soon as they are settled in their new home in France. Will doesn't know why the house was chosen out of all the properties Chiyoh showed him across the world—it certainly isn't the nicest, nor the easiest for them to have sailed to—but Will is grateful because he can get by with the little bits of French he knows.

Without Chiyoh to talk to now, and with Hannibal not rediscovering his voice, Will feels completely alone. Even if she only spoke to him a few sentences. Now it's silent. And it's wrong.

Hannibal walks alongside him at a farmer's market on their first day at the house. Will carries the basket, and Hannibal puts things into it. He doesn't say a word the entire time.

It's been years since they've really been alone together, and Will has so much to say, but without Hannibal talking too, it just feels absolutely terrible.

Hannibal used to tell Will an entire story about every single ingredient he ever used, but now, he just silently pays for what he needs and drops it into the basket hanging on Will's arm. Hannibal doesn't even make any noise, whether pleased, or irritated, or in thought. Just… nothing.

Now that they're fully recovered, and have weaned themselves off the painkillers, Will has been expecting *something.*

"Are you alright?" Will asks after Hannibal puts his latest purchase into their basket.

Hannibal just nods twice and then keeps walking.

Will reaches out and grabs his upper arm, bare as he just wears a short-sleeved button up shirt. He doesn't recall Hannibal ever wearing short sleeves in Baltimore, and has only ever seen Hannibal's forearms a handful of times when he would roll up his sleeves. He can't help but linger on the feeling of Hannibal's skin against his own—the feel of strong muscles moving below his fingertips.

"That's *it?"* Will hisses. "You have never once had nothing to say in all the years we've known each other!"

Hannibal turns and opens his mouth, then closes it again. His eyes are full of pain and something that looks like resignation. He yanks his arm out of Will's hand and turns on his heel again, walking off toward the next stall in the farmer's market.

So, yes, something is completely wrong.

Will feels an ache in his chest that spreads through his arms and settles into his feet. An overwhelming sadness causes tears to form in his eyes, and for his face to heat up even more in the already warm afternoon.

"Han—" Will starts to call out, but cuts himself off before he can finish the name. Instead of drawing attention, and using Hannibal's real name in the process, Will speeds up to catch up to the man already making his way out of the farmer's market.

He catches up to Hannibal a few feet outside the entrance and tugs on his shirt sleeve.

"Hey, I'm sorry, okay?" Will says, as sincerely as possible. "Whatever it is, you can talk to me, okay? I didn't mean to snap at you like that."

Hannibal nods once and continues to walk, but doesn't say another word.

Will takes it upon himself to speak on their walk home, figuring he either won't be interrupted, or he'll say something that will finally provoke Hannibal into talking.

“I’m glad I came with you,” Will starts. “There was nothing left for me in America, and even when I was there, something was always missing.”

At the very least, Will expects Hannibal to prod him with words into revealing the *something,* even if they both already know what it is.

“It’s beautiful here, though,” Will murmurs. “Everything I could need… except maybe my dogs. I know Winston is likely missing me a lot.”

He does see Hannibal nod at that, and glance over with a look that Will can’t quite decipher. He’s never seen it from Hannibal before.

Apologetic. The word pops into his head, but he shakes it out. Hannibal Lecter doesn’t apologize.

Hannibal stops Will with a hand to his chest and stands in front of him. He taps his temple with his pointer finger one, twice, then tilts his head to ask if Will understands.

“You’ll… think about it?” Will guesses. He doesn’t know why Hannibal won’t just speak to him, but he’ll take gestures if that’s what he’s going to get.

Hannibal shrugs and nods as if to say, ‘*Close enough,’* then turns and keeps walking back toward their home.

“Alright…” Will breathes, mostly to himself. He catches up to Hannibal again and says, “I’ve missed your cooking, believe it or not. I’m excited for dinner.”

Hannibal turns his head. and offers him a smile, then reaches out and sets a friendly hand on the back of Will’s neck. He squeezes gently to acknowledge Will’s statement, then drops his hand back to his side again. It’s the first touch Hannibal has given him in years that didn’t have anything to do with blood or death.

It’s all very unnerving.

“You can’t talk?” Will asks, gentle and soft. Nothing like the way he hissed at the market.

Hannibal breathes out harshly through his nose. Utter annoyance, but Will knows it’s not directed at him. It’s directed at Hannibal’s situation.

The older man shakes his head, and shrugs again.

Will doesn't speak again for the rest of the walk home. Hannibal takes the basket from his arms and goes straight to the kitchen to begin preparing dinner. Will knows it’s been so long since he’s cooked, that Will doesn’t want to intrude on such a personal moment.

Instead, he goes out back and settles on one of the chairs on the veranda. He pulls his phone out of his pocket and clicks on the first of the two numbers programmed into it.

“Problems already?” Chiyoh answers in lieu of a greeting.

“Yes, actually,” Will says. “Well, no.” He sighs. “Hannibal isn’t speaking.”

“I was hoping he would begin to do so after recovery,” Chiyoh says, disappointment evident in her voice. “As I am sure you know, he doesn’t like to be seen in a vulnerable state. I assumed that was why he was not speaking. Now, I fear it may be the same as last time.”

“Last time?” Will questions. He leans back, kicking his feet up on the table in front of him. He glances to the kitchen window to make sure Hannibal isn't there to silently reprimand him. “This has happened before, then?”

“When he first came to live with his aunt and uncle, yes,” Chiyoh answers. “It took him quite some time before he began to speak again.”

“So he’s gone nonverbal, then,” Will murmurs. “How long?”

“Two years, give or take,” Chiyoh says. “I now know it was a result of his trauma. He never truly spoke of it to any of us.”

“I imagine not,” Will sighs. “What made him start again?”

“Murusaki helped him greatly,” Chiyoh says. “I cannot tell you what, exactly, she did. I imagine she just gave him a safe place to speak freely, with no expectations. Patience will be appreciated, overall. Hannibal does not tolerate rudeness, as you know.”

“Yeah, he does from me,” Will counters. But he knows she’s right. Forcing Hannibal to speak by being rude will put his head on the chopping block. “Thanks. Bye, Chiyoh.”

He hangs up and sits in his chair for a while longer, trying to decide his course of action.

Naturally he won’t try to force Hannibal. Most of his companions through his adult life couldn’t speak, and so this won’t be too hard. He will miss Hannibal’s easy conversation, though. He already misses the low purr of his voice, the smooth words that fall from his mouth. Will misses that, but he at least has Hannibal.

That’s what has been missing in his life for the last three years.

He goes inside and finds Hannibal in the kitchen, classical music playing on the speaker system in the corner, a knife in his hand. His eyes are closed, his hands unmoving, as Will walks into the room, but his nostrils flare, scenting the air, then his eyes open slowly again.

A small, pleased smile forms on Hannibal’s lips as Will takes a seat at the counter across from him.

Hannibal’s hands start moving again, slicing the potatoes in front of him into thin, round pieces.

Will would expect Hannibal to say something to him at this moment, but he knows that won’t happen until Hannibal is ready. Still, the atmosphere feels no different than it had years before, back when Hannibal took any chance he could to feed Will after, or in place of, their therapy sessions.

It’s moments like these—moments where it feels like before, when Hannibal was just Hannibal, and not the Chesapeake Ripper—that make Will forget their gruesome and bloody history.

He offers Hannibal a smile back.

“Is there anything I can help with?” Will asks.

Hannibal shakes his head, then stops and tilts his head to the side, reconsidering. He ends up just shaking his head again, dismissing Will’s offer.

“Can I ask you a few questions? Yes or no, just nod or shake your head,” Will asks, leaning forward with his elbows on the counter and resting his chin in one hand.

Hannibal shrugs, then nods.

“Chiyoh said this has happened before. You went nonverbal when you first got to your aunt and uncle’s house?”

Hannibal nods and sighs, looking back down to his knife and cutting board. His slicing becomes more erratic, his blade thunking against the board with much more noise than a few seconds ago. Hannibal is ashamed, and Will can feel it rolling off of him. As quick as the emotions come, they’re gone again, as if Hannibal is shutting the door and rebuilding his walls.

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of, you know that, right?” Will asks.

Hannibal just sighs and rolls his eyes.

Rude, Will thinks.

“It happens to me sometimes, you know,” Will tries again.

Hannibal lifts his face just a bit, eyes looking at Will through pale lashes. Hannibal huffs out a breath of air in disbelief. As if he’s saying *‘Your mind could never fail you in such a way,’* because that’s *exactly* what Hannibal would say.

“It *does,”* Will pushes. “Don’t you ever remember those sessions when we’d just sit in silence? I wasn’t being *difficult* , as I know you thought. I mean usually it has never lasted longer than a few days, so I don't understand your case fully, but it still happens. Every time I cancelled on you by text? It was because my throat just felt like no words could possibly come out. So yeah, I kind of get it, Hannibal.”

His face softens just a bit, but he doesn’t look up at Will again.

“It was two years the last time?” Will asks.

Hannibal shakes his head, and Will frowns.

“Chiyoh said—”

Hannibal shakes his head again and holds up four fingers.

“Four years?” Will asks. “But—”

Hannibal sets the knife down and goes over to a drawer, pulling out a sketchbook and a pencil.

He flips it open to a drawing of Castle Lecter that Will watched him do while they were on the boat. Will would recognize the castle anywhere, but especially with the association of Hannibal standing right in front of him, holding the image.

Hannibal takes the pencil and writes something on it before sliding it across the counter to rest in front of Will.

One word rests below it.

Orphanage.

Will nods in understanding.

“Your home was the orphanage you lived in before your uncle found you,” Will says. “How long were you there for?”

Hannibal holds up two fingers again, and then looks back down to his cutting board. He begins scooping the potato slices in his hands, and drops them into a pan next to him.

“You were mute for the whole two years you were there,” Will concludes. “Were you picked on?” Without waiting for Hannibal to nod, he pushes forward, asking something he thinks he already knows the answer to, “What caused it at that time? Mischa’s death?”

A nod at that, just one single incline of Hannibal’s head, then the older man turns away from the counter and goes to the fridge. There’s a notepad on it, held up by a magnet on the back. Likely used for shopping lists, and the like.

Hannibal scribbles something down with a pen he finds nearby and drops the notepad in front of Will. Will looks down and frowns at the message written there.

Please leave me until dinner is ready.

“You can’t just- just *send me away!”* Will growls. “I’m trying to understand you, Hannibal. For God’s sake, isn’t that all you’ve ever wanted from me?”

Hannibal slams a hand down on the counter, rattling all of the utensils, and causing Will to jump in his stool. A storm is raging behind Hannibal’s eyes, and Will has to convince himself he’s not scared. He has to remind himself that Hannibal won’t do anything to him.

Except Will doesn’t actually *know* that. Because Hannibal has never proved as much.

No, all Will knows is that Hannibal is extremely pissed at him now, and he is resorting to intimidation tactics and violence where he can’t use his words. After everything, Hannibal

still can't let Will in, not truly. Not even in something Will can truly understand and relate to.

"Fine," Will grits out. "You're such an asshole sometimes. You can't even speak and yet…"

Will doesn't finish that sentence because Hannibal fixes him with a glare so strong Will thinks he could rip his organs out with just his eyes. If looks could kill, this one would make it a slow, painful death.

Instead, he goes to the fridge, pulls out lunch meat and cheese, then a loaf of bread off the counter. He fixes himself a sandwich, all while Hannibal continues to glare at him.

"Fuck your dinner," Will mutters, leaving the kitchen with a plate, and an entire bottle of wine from the rack in the pantry.

He locks himself in his bedroom and plops down on the floor in front of the door, sandwich plate in his lap, and wine bottle next to him. He pretends he isn't scared Hannibal will come after him, and that he's just sitting in front of the door because he *wants* to and not because he thinks Hannibal might kick the door down.

His sandwich gets finished in no time, and he sets the plate down beside him, then picks up the bottle of wine. He groans, remembering that, in his haste to leave the kitchen in a dramatic fashion, he forgot to grab a corkscrew.

He sets the bottle down next to him and fumbles through his pockets for his Leatherman before remembering it's somewhere at the bottom of the Atlantic ocean.

Defeated, he drops his head back against the door, staring up at the ceiling for a minute. All he wants is to drink an entire bottle of wine and pass out, but he can't even have the satisfaction of wasting Hannibal's expensive wine on his unrefined palate. For the purpose—not to taste and enjoy—of getting entirely plastered and forgetting everything so he can just sleep. So he can forget about the tension in the household for a few hours. He can't even have that because it means he has to go downstairs to open the bottle.

Not even a day into living together, and they've already had an argument. Not even a single word came out of Hannibal's mouth, but Will feels as though a thousand words cut through his skin. Hannibal has always had a way of doing that, voice or no.

He gets up and decides he needs to either get through the night sober, or brave Hannibal's wrath by going into the kitchen for a corkscrew.

He tiptoes out, down the hall, and back down the stairs to the kitchen.

Hannibal isn't in there, but the smell of food comes from the oven, and the music is still playing on the speaker in the corner. Which all means he's nearby.

Will opens several drawers before finding what he's looking for, then spots a bottle of whiskey on the counter. It wasn't there when he first went upstairs, which means Hannibal put it there for him. The seal is unbroken, though he really doesn't put it past Hannibal to find a way to somehow drug it anyway. Still, he can't be bothered to worry about that.

He discards the corkscrew back into the drawer, then takes the bottle of whiskey instead. He leaves the bottle of wine on the counter, then heads back for his room.

Hannibal shows up in the doorway, blocking Will's exit. Arms crossed over his chest, an impatient look on his face. Expectant.

"I'm not thanking you, and I'm not apologizing," Will mutters. "Out of my way."

Hannibal reaches out and snatches his chin in one hand, squeezing his jawbone to the point of pain. Will tries to jerk away, but Hannibal's just as strong as he always has been.

Somehow.

Will, on the other hand, has never felt weaker, after being practically bed ridden on a boat for the last two months, with only meager provisions shared between three people. Nowhere to go for a run like he did almost every morning back home. Too much pain in his shoulder to do any sort of arm strengthening exercises. The most he could possibly do was some light ab workouts, and a bit of physical therapy aided by Chiyoh, but even that took too much out of him without proper nutrition, and with painkillers keeping him drowsy.

So maybe, no Hannibal hasn't maintained his full strength, but Will just doesn't have much fight in him anymore.

Hannibal's face changes in a way that has always struck fear into Will. Something about it has always said, *'I dare you to fuck with me,'* and now is no different. In the past, it was rarely directed toward Will himself and it still terrified him. Even before Hannibal was a murder suspect.

Especially after Hannibal became a murder suspect.

Will can hear the cutting words that have gone along with the same look in the past. Can feel the cutting *blades* that have torn into him and left him devoid of everything he needed to survive. *Everything* being *Hannibal*.

This causes a slight panic in Will that he forces back down below the surface. He thinks that this might be it—Hannibal won't kill him, no, but he'll *leave.* It feels so final, the way Hannibal looks at him. It feels like another minute of this, and the point will be drilled into Will's brain enough that he doesn't need to suffer another major injury for Hannibal to leave him gutted.

Hannibal's top lip lifts and his nostrils flare slightly in a snarl. His eyes are colder than Will has ever seen them. As if this is worse than the night in Baltimore, somehow. As if Will has betrayed him all over again.

The touch to his face is nowhere near as gentle as it was the night Hannibal gutted him. Also missing is the blood covered Hannibal's shirt, and streaming from his nose. There's no knife in either of Hannibal's hands, but the anger evident on the killer's face is enough to make his scar burn.

All Will can do is stare right back.

He needs to show he's not afraid, even if he is at that moment.

He remembers Chiyoh's words from over three years ago. *There are means of influence other than violence.*

To turn the tables, Will lifts his free hand—the one not clutching the bottle so hard he's surprised it hasn't broken—and gently places it on Hannibal's chest, rubbing lightly, then moving up to cup his cheek. He rubs his thumb across the scar on Hannibal's cheekbone, then moves his hand up to sweep Hannibal's hair away from his forehead, and back down to cup his cheek again.

Surprise flashes across Hannibal's face, and as quick as it comes, it's gone again. Hannibal removes his hand from Will's chin, and takes a step away.

The cold, dead stare is gone, and replaced with a reluctant fondness.

Will stands there in the doorway, dumbfounded, as Hannibal steps around him to go back into the kitchen.

It's as if that one touch had pulled Hannibal out of his rage. As if it erased every betrayal between them, and they have started anew. Maybe they have.

He stands there, and realizes that despite all of Hannibal's anger—despite all of Will's own—Will has still chosen Hannibal. He's chosen to accept the pain, fear, and heartbreak. He's accepted it all, and he's given Hannibal love, and gentleness in return.

He knows, now, that he just showed Hannibal that he can falter in his acceptance, but that he'll always come back around. He'll always find the correct amount of *anything* to bring them back to each other. To find their equal footing again. To rebuild the former stability they found in each other in the past.

It's reminiscent of the night on the cliff, where they had just killed a man and then embraced lovingly on the cliff edge. Even if Will pulled them over directly after, they had been together. They found each other again, and still decided to stay together.

It's all a matter of finding that balance at any point the scales tip too far to one side. Two sides of the same coin, identically different, the two of them. Always together, always trying to find their equilibrium. But they can only do it together.

Will understands, and he knows, without any words spoken between them, that Hannibal understands it, too.

There doesn't have to be any more violence.

Hannibal leaves Will where he stands. The affectionate look on his face transforms back into his usual unreadable expression as he turns to walk away.

He pulls dinner out of the oven and sets it on the counter while Will stands in the doorway, the bottle of whiskey still clutched tightly in his hands.

The smell of dinner causes his stomach to growl, despite the sandwich he ate not too long ago.

Hannibal answers that by pulling two plates out of the cupboard, as well as two glasses, and two sets of silverware. He sets them on the counter and taps the space next to them, then tilts his head toward the dining room.

“You want me to set the table?” Will asks quietly.

Hannibal nods once, so Will sets the bottle on the counter, then gathers up everything Hannibal laid out.

He sets everything out at spots across the table from each other, and takes his own seat. Closest to the exit in case he needs a quick getaway.

That doesn’t happen, though.

Dinner is quiet except for the sounds of forks against plates and wine glasses being set back down on the table.

Will can’t help but glance at the way Hannibal holds his knife, calculating whether or not there’s a threat there. It doesn’t seem like there is, especially because Hannibal doesn’t look up at him once the entire time they eat.

It’s odd. Hannibal used to always watch his guests eat.

Because they were being fed humans, Will reminds himself.

There would have been no time to get humans into this dish unless Hannibal left while Will was hidden away in his room. Even then, it wouldn’t have been enough time.

So it’s not that Hannibal is being avoidant (he likely still is), but more so that he just doesn’t have the same interest in his dinner guests as he used to.

After dinner, Hannibal puts a record on the turntable in the living room, and pours Will a fresh glass of wine.

They sit across from each other in arm chairs, just like old times. But this time, neither of them speak. There’s no exchange, no conversation, just eyes staring into each other’s while they slowly sip their wine.

At one point the record stops and Hannibal gets up to flip it to the other side. When he comes back, he carries the notepad and a pen.

“I ought to get you a whiteboard and a dry erase marker, so we don’t waste so much paper,” Will says as Hannibal sits down across from him again.

Hannibal rolls his eyes at that, something Will doesn't think he's ever seen the other man do.

"Did you just roll your eyes at me?" Will say, feigning disbelief. "Isn't that rather *rude,* Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal's lips pull into a smile and he looks down into his lap. He writes something down, lifts the pen again, taps it on his knee, and frowns. He considers the paper then writes a few more words.

Will's own face drops into a frown as he reads it.

Will you get bored? If I can't speak, will you leave me?

"No," Will whispers. "Hannibal, I… I didn't hear you speak for three whole years. Before that? It was eight months, and before that? You gutted me and killed our daughter. I'm here now, despite all that, aren't I? You could never speak another word to me and I'd still crave your company, just as I have done."

He hands the notepad back over, and ignores the way his hands tremble from such an admission. He glances up and sees Hannibal's eyes wet with tears, and quickly looks away.

Hannibal writes down a few more words and hands the paper back. It's somewhat tedious, and not at all how Will imagined running with Hannibal would be, but he's trying to take what he can get. If a silent Hannibal is what he gets, then a silent Hannibal is what he'll have.

He reads the paper.

You were mad earlier.

Will scoffs. "Yeah. So were you. I have a feeling both of us might be mad for a while, don't you?"

Hannibal considers that, then nods. He extends his hand and for a brief second Will thinks he's reaching for his own, but then he remembers the notepad in his lap, and recovers from that line of thinking. He hands it back.

The next note reads:

We've hurt each other in ways that most people would find to be beyond forgiveness. Not you and I. Hurting each other is what we know. It's how we love.

Will ignores that last sentence and the feelings it invokes in him.

"There are means of influence other than violence," Will murmurs, mostly to himself.

Hannibal inclines his head in an almost nod.

"I don't wish to hurt you anymore, Hannibal," Will says. "I hope you'll return that sentiment."

With that, Will stands, drains the rest of his wine glass, then leaves the room. He deposits his glass in the sink, and almost just leaves it, before deciding to wash it and dry it.

It’s late enough that he can go up to bed without being considered rude, so that’s what he does.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think! This fic is fully outlined, and I'm hoping to have regular, weekly uploads (most likely late Sunday nights or early Monday mornings.)

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> Thank you all for reading! I'm hoping this fic isn't too boring, but I'm not too sure. It's difficult to write these interactions without Hannibal's voice, but it's an enjoyable challenge for me.
>
> Please continue to leave comments and kudos!!!

Will lays awake that night in his bed and lets several things go through his mind. For the first time since the fall, he's really able to think about it. Starting with the moment he took them over the edge—he had planned for them to die, and he supposes, in a way, parts of them did. Will no longer feels the need to fight against Hannibal's influence, and it's clear Hannibal left something in the ocean himself.

He remembers slipping in and out of consciousness as Hannibal carried him up the stone steps back to the house, half dragging him, half carrying him. He's amazed Hannibal was able to do so, with both a bullet wound, and having taken the brunt of the impact when they hit the water. He's surprised Hannibal can even walk now, as it is.

Hannibal had gotten them to the house, and tended to Will's injuries, dosing him up with tons of painkillers. Will thinks he might have even been given blood somehow. However Hannibal had stored it, he doesn't know. He thinks he remembers a shower, both of them leaning heavily on each other, Hannibal washing his hair, and then helping him into pajamas.

That night at the cliff house, Hannibal laid beside him and ran his fingers through Will's hair as he shook, trying to get warm from the frigid ocean that stayed with him for so long after. Will clutched onto Hannibal's arm and cried that night while they waited for Chiyoh to rescue them.

He remembers passing by Francis Dolarhyde's body on the ground, and being laid down on the stone bench. Chiyoh was hazy in front of him, standing in all black clothes, her rifle strapped to her body, and several bags in her arms. He remembers looking over to Hannibal crouching on the ground by Dolarhyde's body with a bag of medical supplies next to him. Through the haze of painkillers, Will didn't realize what was happening at the time, but as he thinks about it now, two months later, he knows that Francis Dolarhyde's body had a huge part in sustaining them during their journey.

There are a few instances where he recalls asking Hannibal where they were going, what the plan was, if they were safe, and never getting any answers. Maybe Will should've known, then, that he wouldn't be hearing Hannibal's voice for a long, long time to come.

He was so upset by some of the conversations they had at the BSHCI, pissed that Hannibal would speak of his family and accuse him of just coming back to get the old scent again. He was so upset then, and just wanted Hannibal to shut up, but now… now he wants nothing more than to hear the other man's voice.

He doesn't want to think about what that means.

He doesn't want to think about what it means that he came with, or that he has stayed. True, in the beginning he was so injured that he would not have been able to leave if he tried, then they were on a boat with no cell service for nearly two months, so there was no chance of leaving then, either.

But what's stopping him now?

Bedelia's words come to the forefront of his mind.

But do you ache for him?

Will has to honestly consider that, and what his own feelings are. He has to start with Molly, though, and how he felt for her through their entire relationship. He thinks about what he's giving up, and *why.*

He considers how he's really leaving behind a comfortable life for… for what, exactly? What does Hannibal even expect from him? Will doesn't even know what he expects for himself. Going on, becoming a killer like Hannibal, does not seem like something he could do.

It was beautiful, sure. Killing Dolarhyde with Hannibal *was* beautiful, but it was a moment of passion, strong passion. Had they not killed him, who is to say what would have happened to either of them? Will worked in self defense. He always has, and that was not a whole lot different. Not really. What Hannibal did, what Hannibal does, is not, and never was self defense except for in the most obvious cases.

That is not Will.

Thinking of Molly, Walter, the dogs… Will feels tears fall from his eyes and quickly wipes them away. Molly never really saw Will as someone capable of darkness, only ever seeing the good in him, and he's throwing that away. She didn't understand everything about him, but she still tried.

He knows he's throwing away the chance at having a wife and a son, and all of their dogs. Throwing it all away for someone who killed one of his only friends, his surrogate daughter, and gutted him, carved open his head, and framed him for murder. Hannibal spent their entire friendship (Relationship? Courtship? What even were they? What even are they *now?*) manipulating and influencing Will into becoming a killer.

Loving Molly had been easy, she only saw the good in him, barely knew about his past. Not only that, but he barely knew hers. But with Hannibal everything is painful. Every knife, every syringe, every meal, everything. Everything is rooted in pain, and he can never forget.

He *knows* , and *remembers* every single thing Hannibal has done for him and yet… he forgives him.

Forgiveness has been granted in so many cases. Will forgives Hannibal for opening his stomach with a blade and leaving him to bleed on the kitchen floor. He forgives Hannibal for slicing Beverly like a tomato because Will feels mostly responsible for that. He had known Hannibal was dangerous and sent Beverly regardless. Cutting open his head, getting them caught by Mason Verger's men, getting his biological child torn from Margot's body, being framed for murder and losing his repuatation, all of those things can be blame placed in Hannibal's hands. Will, for some fucked reason, forgives Hannibal for all of it.

Unnecessarily killing Abigail… Will doesn't know if he can grant forgiveness for that, though. He holds onto that every day of his life, holds onto her. It was Will's own betrayal, his own mistake, sure, but Hannibal had no reason to punish Abigail for that… it was completely uncalled for. Abigail had gotten out of the home of one cannibalistic serial killer with a neck wound, only to be placed into the home of another, this time not getting out, suffering another neck wound that she couldn't be saved from in the end. An ending that had her back where she started.

Will feels a surge of anger that he pushes down. Today it was clear that staying with Hannibal means pushing down emotions, no matter how hard it may be. And he really wants to stay with Hannibal for some reason. Needs to stay with him, he realizes. He wants to continue to offer gentleness in the face of Hannibal's wrath. He wants to continue to see the way Hannibal's face softens into fondness when their argument has come to a close. He wants to continue to sit across from him, even if no words are exchanged in their traditional sense. He wants it all. Dinners, the opera, killing, playing chess, and reading, swimming on sunny days, and staying in on rainy ones. He wants to share all of those things with the man down the hall.

Could it be love? Could he ache for Hannibal in the same way Hannibal aches for him?

Yes, Will thinks. Yes is the answer to that.

It has to be love if he can overlook all of those things, if he can leave his wife and son, and all of his dogs, just to be with Hannibal.

So he loves Hannibal, is *in love with* Hannibal, but as Will lays in bed thinking, he doesn't know if he can truly be what Hannibal wants.

If Will decides he doesn't want to kill with him now, even after all this time, after all of Hannibal's work to push him toward that life, will Hannibal leave him? Or force him to leave instead? Hannibal says they love each other by hurting each other, but… what if Will doesn't want to hurt *anyone?*

Will's chest tightens at the thought that Hannibal might kick him out to fend for himself, no money and no food, left to die. Or worse, that Hannibal will just decide to leave him. Death, Will can deal with. Separation would be too much now.

The immense need he feels in his entire being for Hannibal scares him.

On top of killing, he doesn't know if he can be what Hannibal wants from a romantic standpoint either. He can't see himself having sex with him. In fact, Will is quite sure he's heterosexual. He's always told himself, and others, that, anyways. He's never been in love with another man, he doesn't think.

But then, he doesn't think he was ever *in love* with Molly, either. Nor any of the women he dated, or was interested in, or slept with. What he feels for Hannibal is more than all of those women combined.

He decides that he can, in fact, say with no uncertainty, that he's in love with Hannibal. He loved Molly, but more like someone would love a best friend. His love for Hannibal starts there, but spreads into many different kinds of love and downright obsession.

I'm not gay, though, Will thinks to himself. He settles on that thought for the night. *Not even bisexual,* he adds just before he falls asleep.

When he wakes up, he gets dressed in the clothes Hannibal brought from the cliff house. He'll need to ask about getting more clothes because there's not a lot, and not all of it is things he wants to wear, anyway.

He finds Hannibal in the kitchen cooking breakfast, and Will can easily see it's a protein scramble like the one they ate during their first meal together.

"I'm going to need to go clothes shopping," Will says as he leans against the counter.

Hannibal nods, and holds up a finger to let Will know the matter can be discussed in a moment. He puts food on both of their plates and hands one to Will. Will takes it into the dining room and sits down, waiting for Hannibal to join before he starts eating.

Will is handed a notebook as Hannibal walks into the dining room, and it's open to a page filled with words. Will reads it as he eats his breakfast.

The top of the page is titled ' *To do,'* and below it is a subheading that says *'Now,'*

Under that subheading, Will reads in Hannibal's neatest print:

Clothes shopping — Both Will and myself

Groceries

Find job/s — forge certifications, if need be

Will looks up at Hannibal at that and frowns. "What kind of job do you plan to get if you can't talk?"

Hannibal shrugs, then reaches out to take the notebook again. He writes with a pen he pulls from his shirt pocket.

When he's handed the notebook back, Will reads next to the job point: *Your personal assistant/secretary.*

Will can't help but laugh at the idea of Hannibal running to get him coffee or taking appointments and notes.

"What am *I* going to do?" Will asks.

Hannibal takes the notebook back and writes down *'Open a boat repair shop, or a psychiatric practice. We have the money. Jobs are just a cover.'*

"Not a bad idea," Will agrees.

Will reads the rest of the list.

Pool services — Will needs to call

Wi-Fi & TV — Will needs to call

Laundry

Check news once Wi-Fi is set up

The rest of the list is things like that. Easy, no problem things. Will speaks enough French that he isn't worried at all, and is able to call someone for the pool to come this afternoon, and is able to call someone to set up Wi-Fi and TV for them as a package deal the next day.

They go out shopping, and buy iPhones for both of them to replace the flip phones Chiyoh bought before they left the United States. Will is able to get as many clothes as he wants, and Hannibal just waves him off every time he asks about a budget. They manage to get Hannibal a new tablet, and Will a laptop.

By the time they get home from shopping, Will is tired and in need of a nap. He lays down on the large sectional couch in the living room, wishing the TV was set up so he could watch something while he tries to fall asleep, but he has to sit in silence instead.

Hannibal turns the page of the notebook, and hands it to Will, but he shakes his head and pushes it back. He shakes his head, and pulls a blanket over himself, shutting his eyes.

"Nap time," Will murmurs. "You should too, probably. Keep your health up."

He cracks one eye open just in time to catch Hannibal rolling his eyes at him.

Will can't help but smirk.

He shuts his eyes again and listens to the sounds of Hannibal shuffling around the house. Just before he's about to drift off, he feels Hannibal sit on the section of the couch at Will's feet. Hannibal pulls Will's feet into his lap, causing Will to jolt awake at the surprise. Will knows the couch is big enough that they could both stretch out on different sections to nap and never touch each other, but here Hannibal is, right in his space. He doesn't know why Hannibal doesn't sit somewhere else on the large sectional, and is about to voice that, but the satisfied look on Hannibal's face stops him from even opening his mouth.

Hannibal rubs a soothing motion on Will's ankle with his thumb, and Will settles back down.

He lets himself fall asleep like that, somehow comforted by the man that has brought him so much pain in the last few years.

By the time Will wakes up, Hannibal has migrated down the couch to lay half on top of him and half wedged between him and the back of the couch. His face is pressed against Will's ribs, a hand splayed under his shirt atop the scar on his belly. It's warm and cozy how they're cuddled together, and Will doesn't let himself dwell on that feeling, or what if could mean for him.

Will moves carefully to not jostle the sleeping man as he gets up, and gets a pillow under Hannibal's head.

Hannibal reaches out in his sleep and grasps Will's wrist, causing a panic to rise in his chest. Even unconscious, Hannibal's grip is strong and nearly painful. Instead of leaving, Will settles down onto the couch again, and Hannibal lets go.

"You're awake," Will mutters. "I know you are."

Hannibal doesn't do anything in response, so Will just kicks his feet up on the coffee table and picks up the notebook Hannibal was writing his lists in.

He flips it to the page after the to-do list they finished today to find one titled—

Long Term

He hits Hannibal in the chest when he reads the first name on the list. All Will can see is red.

Hannibal is immediately awake, rubbing his chest in confusion as he sits up.

"*Molly?"* Will yells. "Molly is on your long term list? You're going to *kill* her?"

Hannibal sighs and rubs sleep from his eyes, completely unbothered. He picks up a pen from the coffee table and rips the notebook from Will's hands. The paper rips from Will gripping it so tight in anger. The audacity of Hannibal to think he can kill Molly makes Will want to kill Hannibal instead.

He wasn't in love with Molly in the way he should have been, but that doesn't give Hannibal the right to put her on his kill list without even consulting Will first. Not that Will would have said yes! Molly was his best friend for years, and while she never understood completely, she understood *enough.* And *that* was enough for Will to get through his separation from Hannibal. In truth, he thinks Hannibal should be entirely grateful for what Molly has done while Hannibal was in a prison of his own making.

Will is pulled back to reality by Hannibal thrusting the notebook into his lap and getting off the couch.

Hannibal is already out of the room by the time Will even looks at the paper in front of him.

It's written on a new sheet of paper, and it's written furiously and so quickly Will has a hard time reading it all, but by the time he deciphers it all, he feels like a total jackass for his reaction.

He sighs and pushes his hair off his forehead and reads it over again.

You expressed missing your dear Winston, if you recall. I did not write Molly down as a future kill, and I'm not even positive there will be future kills for a very long time. I merely wanted to find a way to safely contact her and see if there was any way she would be willing to part with your beloved companion. I didn't mean for the confusion, and would prefer you don't resort to violence before asking for answers. I will be in the library. Do not disturb me. We may go over the rest of the list at dinner.

Will goes out for a walk then, needing to be out of the house to keep him from going to Hannibal. Maybe Hannibal wants Will to go to him, maybe he expects it, but Will can't risk the chance. He needs to remove the temptation of apologizing for his behavior, so he goes out for a while.

He likes the area they've settled in, and the weather is nice, but he still can't stay out as long as he wants. His body isn't fully recovered, and while he would love to take the opportunity of being on solid ground again to go for a run, he knows he needs to start slow.

He ends up finding a park that he walks through, stopping to sit on benches every once in a while. He watches as couples walk by hand in hand, as owners go by with their dogs, as families stroll. He sees a young woman, around twenty-three if he has to guess, skinny and brunette, a scarf tied tight around her neck. He can't help but think about Abigail. She'd be in her early twenties now, probably living somewhere in Europe if Will had just left with Hannibal the night he was asked all those years ago.

No one had to die, but Abigail did, and with her a part of Will did too. They could have been a family.

The young woman turns her head and catches him watching her, and he quickly looks away. Her face isn't quite like Abigail's, not really, and the illusion dissolves. Not that he truly thought it could be her. He had seen photos of her lifeless body, lips and wounds sewn shut, eyes eternally closed. He knows she's dead, but that can't mean he can't hope sometimes.

To get away from her completely, he gets up off the bench and keeps walking until he comes out of the other end of the park, and finds a small cafe.

He orders a drink and a pastry, and sits outside on the sidewalk at a small table.

By the time he's been gone over two hours, his phone has buzzed six times, but he hasn't checked it. The only person that has his new phone number is Hannibal, and Will doesn't want to talk to him right now.

He eventually does get up and walks back to the house. He checks his messages along the way, and they're nothing really important. Just Hannibal asking where he is, a single question

mark, then another message saying what time dinner will be ready, another single question mark, and the fifth message tells him to be careful.

The sixth takes Will completely by surprise. Just one word, but it's not something he has ever thought he would hear (or read) from Hannibal.

Sorry.

While Will has no fucking idea what the man is apologizing for, and while it's not a very heartfelt apology, Will accepts it for what it is. Whatever Hannibal has decided he is apologizing for, Will is going to forgive him for that, too.

"I'm back!" Will calls out when he gets through the door.

He half expects Hannibal to come running to greet him, but that doesn't happen. Will follows the sound of classical music into the kitchen, and finds Hannibal resting with his elbows on the counter as he stands with a book in one hand and a glass of wine in the other.

Hannibal glances up when Will walks into the room, then back down to his book. He finishes reading the page, turns it, then places a page marker in it before closing it. He sets it down out of the way and takes a long sip of wine, eyes on Will as he does.

He's waiting for Will to say something, obviously, but Will isn't quite sure what he's waiting for.

"I went for a walk in the park," Will tells him. He gets himself a glass from the cabinet and holds it out so Hannibal can pour him some wine. "I saw a girl that reminded me of Abigail."

It's the first time he's mentioned her out loud in years. It still hurts just as much as it did the day he found out she hadn't survived. Back then it hurt so much he conjured up a version of her to keep him company while he searched for Hannibal. He doesn't think he can do that this time. He doesn't think he can bring any version of Abigail back into a house with Hannibal in it.

And yet, here he is himself. When everyone else in the world would think to keep Will out of Hannibal's path, just the same.

Hannibal, of course, doesn't respond.

Will's getting used to his silence, and can read his responses in his facial expressions if need be, but now Hannibal doesn't offer anything at all.

To cover up the significance of talking about her, Will goes on to say, "I saw a dog that reminded me of one back home. Do you really think you could get Winston here?"

Hannibal nods just once, and turns away to start cooking their dinner.

Will sits and watches him, but doesn't help, and by the time it's finished, and they're sitting at the dining room table, Will has had a lot of time to think of all the things he needs to do to

get ready for Winston. Even if it's a long time from now, getting the house ready and buying him toys will be a good way to keep busy.

The notebook has made another appearance, but Will ignores it for the moment in favor of starting to eat his dinner.

Halfway through his plate, he finally picks up the notebook.

Alana

Jack

Bedelia

All listed below Molly, each with a 'K' written next to them.

"Does K stand for kill?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods once, and looks at Will expectantly. Like he's asking for an opinion. Will realizes that Hannibal *is* looking for an opinion.

"Alana has too much money and power," Will starts off with. "She'll be hard to find, and even hard to get to once we do. She'll have hoards of security, all armed. She'll likely be armed as well. Can never be too safe with you on the loose."

Hannibal tilts his head, asking for Will's conclusion.

Will lets out a breath of air. "I don't think you should kill her. Not for a long, long time, at least."

Hannibal purses his lips, then nods as if it's just that easy. Like Will can just say anything, and he'll agree to it. Maybe that's what's going on. Hannibal did turn himself in for Will, after all. Maybe Hannibal will do other things for Will, too. Anything to keep him.

"Jack will be a hard fight. He knows how to hurt you, and he has come out alive *twice,* Hannibal," Will sighs. "You would need to be more prepared than you have ever been, and that's only accounting for the physical strength between the two of you. We don't know about his protection either. Do it if you need to, but I wouldn't suggest it."

Hannibal sighs, disappointment across his face, but nods. It's reluctant, but Will can tell he has been thinking the exact same thing about a fight against Jack.

This leaves the last person on the list. Bedelia Du Maurier. The woman that took Will's rightful place in Florence. He deserved to be by Hannibal's side all those months, not her. She took something from him that he is now desperately trying to take back. There's only one way that makes sense for that.

"Now, the others I have no desire to kill," Will starts. "It would put you in a dangerous situation to be alone for those, which is another reason why I would say no to them. Together, we could have a chance, but separated?" Will shakes his head. He taps the page just over

Bedelia's name. After all of his worries about whether or not he can be what Hannibal needs —whether or not he can kill with him—he has come to a conclusion.

"I want to kill Bedelia," Will states.

Chapter 3

Hannibal appears to be absolutely delighted that Will has made that choice. His eyes shine bright, and his lips keep trying to form a smile as he reaches across the dining room table. Will expects him to take the notebook back, but instead Hannibal grabs onto his hand instead, giving him a gentle squeeze, and finally letting his smile show.

He lets go and pulls his hand back all too soon, and Will is left with just the ghost of his touch—a warmth fading much too fast for comfort. Will has to stop himself from reaching out and pulling that hand back to himself. He looks across the table at Hannibal picking up his utensils again, and watches as Hannibal cuts through his meat with his knife.

One swift movement with that knife and Will could be bleeding out before he even knew what happened to him. Those hands have brought him so much pain, and yet so much tenderness all at once. Even tenderness in times of pain. When Hannibal cradled Will's skull as he sawed into it, or when he cupped Will's cheek when he sliced open his belly. Hannibal's hands have saved as many lives as they have taken, and Will has been intended for both outcomes on multiple occasions.

Hannibal glances up at him, catching him staring, and Will quickly looks away, down at his plate. He resumes eating until the plate is empty, and quickly picks it up to take it into the kitchen. Hannibal comes up behind him at the sink, and brushes a hand against the small of his back as he adds his plate to the water. He leaves as swiftly and quietly as he came, making no indication that the contact is anything out of the ordinary to him.

The touch is unexpected, but not unwelcome. The way Hannibal does it is so casual, and Will has to wonder if it's just something he always does when sharing a kitchen with another person. He thinks back to *before* when he was sharing meals with Hannibal in Baltimore, but he can't really remember if it was similar back then. To be fair, before his own stint in prison, he was very sick, and hardly remembers most of what went on during those days, and what he *can* remember, he doesn't always know if he can trust. After he was released, he had a bit more on his mind, but he thinks he may have been the one that laid subtle touches to the other's body as they moved around each other in various spaces.

He thinks he can recall standing in Hannibal's office and looking out the window, a hand on his shoulder. Perhaps a hand was laid across his forearm in conversation once or twice. Everything else though… it comes back to pain, or those tender touches before, during, and after such pain. Except for that time in that barn, just after Hannibal stopped him from killing Clark Ingram. The hand caressing his face as Hannibal spoke of transformation and unpredictability was just that. There was nothing casual about that, though, so Will decides it does not fall into the same category of touch as a casual hand on his back in the kitchen while washing up after dinner.

He concludes that he has no fucking idea, but he also concludes that he enjoys it and it feels familiar and casual enough that it must be something he has experienced before. As if his body remembers what his mind cannot.

After washing both plates and the silverware, Will finds Hannibal in the living room, laying on the couch with his eyes shut. He cracks one open when Will sits down on the couch, a section between them. Will picks up a book from the coffee table and flips it open to the first page.

He pretends to read for a few minutes, but all he can feel is Hannibal's eyes boring into his skull. It gets to be too much, and he abruptly shuts the book and stands.

"I am going to bed," Will announces. "Will you write up an outline of your plan for Bedelia? I know you have one already."

Hannibal nods and shuts his eyes again.

"Thanks," Will sighs, wishing they could just discuss it now instead of having to wait for Hannibal to write it down.

Will is woken up the next morning by a hand shaking his shoulder. Before he can even open his eyes, a piece of paper is being shoved against one of his hands.

He slowly opens his eyes, trying to blink away the sting that tells him to sleep longer. He closes his eyes for a moment too long, and Hannibal tugs on a lock of his hair.

Will swats his hand away and squints at the words on the paper. They're still too blurry so he rubs at his eyes and reaches for the glasses on his nightstand, only to remember they aren't there. They're still in his jacket pocket at the cliff house.

The words come into focus after another minute and Will groans in frustration.

Cable man is here. You must speak with him.

"Fine. Give me a minute," Will sighs.

Hannibal nods and leaves the room to let Will get dressed.

Will gets downstairs, still wiping sleep from his eyes, and finds Hannibal in the kitchen cooking breakfast. A man in a uniform for the cable company stands across from him with a glass of water in hand.

"Bonjour," Will greets. He goes to the coffee maker and pours himself a mug, drinking it quickly. He hisses in pain as it burns his tongue, and he can see Hannibal's smirk out of the corner of his eye.

Will speaks with the man about how many TVs they have, and where they think the Wi-Fi router should go, and takes him into the study to show him a good spot.

"Your husband," the man starts. "Is he a singer?"

"Huh?" *Husband? Singer?*

"His note said he is on vocal rest," the man clarifies.

One part of the original question makes sense now, Will supposes, but the other part… He shakes his head.

“No. No, he isn’t,” Will answers. “Excuse me.”

Will goes back into the kitchen, finding Hannibal still at the stove. He glances up when Will walks in, and his body stiffens when Will keeps moving toward him. Will stops right at his side, chest pressing against Hannibal’s arm.

“Don’t tell people we’re married unless you have a damn good reason for it,” Will says, low enough that the man in the other room can’t hear him, but in a way that Hannibal knows it’s a warning.

He can’t deal with… whatever this is. He can’t pretend to be married to the man and act that way in front of others. Not when he’s still trying to figure out his feelings for Hannibal; that would be too confusing for the both of them. It may give Hannibal a false hope that Will may not be able to act on, and it just makes Will feel like he’s obligated to act on it.

Hannibal picks up the pen next to him and writes: *Noted.*

He puts a few inches of space between them, and puts the sausages and eggs on two plates, handing one to Will, and taking his own to the dining room. Will follows after him, and sees the notebook sitting in front of his usual table spot.

Will sits down and starts eating as he flips through the plan Hannibal laid out to see how many pages it takes up. At least four, front and back covered on all four of them. Will reads the plan in full while he sits at the dining room table. Even as he finishes his food, and Hannibal takes both of their plates, he sits there reading it.

Nothing sticks out to him as being needed to change, but he does frown at the date. Hannibal wrote a date nearly two years into the future.

He wants to go do it *now,* and while that isn’t realistic, he knows that two years isn’t a necessary wait time either.

He would argue about it, but he can’t stand to have another argument with Hannibal where half of it is written on paper while Will waits in silence. He closes the notebook and picks it up, going to find Hannibal.

Hannibal is sitting in the living room on the couch, a book in his lap, that he clearly isn’t reading. The cable guy is setting up the TV, and Hannibal is watching him as he does. Hannibal sits up straight when Will walks in, possibly expecting an argument, or to be asked to talk in a different room.

Will sits down right next to him, nudging him in the side with his elbow. Hannibal turns his head and glares at him.

“Rude,” Will murmurs. He moves in close, pressing his nose to Hannibal’s head, and breathes in his ear, “Read your book. You’re obvious.”

Hannibal huffs out a breath of air and settles back into the couch. Will leans forward and grabs the other book off the coffee table, and sits back, leaning into Hannibal's side. If the cable guy thinks they're married, he might as well pretend for this one day.

It takes Will by surprise when Hannibal puts an arm around his shoulders, and he sits up straight, his own shoulder getting caught under Hannibal's arm. It pulls on the injury, still painful because he's neglected his physical therapy.

"Fuck," Will hisses. He grabs the shoulder with his other hand, trying to massage the pain out, but it just hurts more. Hannibal turns to face him, concern written across his features. It's the most concern Will has ever seen on him.

Not even when Will was bleeding out… any of the times he was bleeding out.

"Fine. I'm fine," Will assures him. "Just my shoulder. Just sit back down."

Hannibal looks skeptical, tilting his head, and opening his mouth, but Will fixes him with a glare, so he sits back where he was. Will settles in next to him, and puts his arm around the back of the couch to keep it from pulling his shoulder down. He should really be in a sling still, but this will have to work for him. He ignores the fact that he practically has his arm around Hannibal's shoulders.

All this time, Will can tell the other man in the room is trying to ignore them. No doubt he's going to remember them, and then see them on the news later. That raises an alarm in Will's brain, reminding him that they're on the run. That Hannibal is a convicted serial killer, and a cannibal, and that he's going to be plastered on every news outlet in the world.

It's known that he has ties to France, and yet here they are. They're being entirely stupid.

"You wouldn't happen to have a business card, would you?" Will asks the man.

Hannibal straightens next to him, going completely still. The cable man finishes what he's doing and stands, digging into his pocket. He hands Will a company card with his name printed on the front.

"Thank you," Will smiles. He opens the notebook that he set on the coffee table to a fresh page, and sets the card into it, sticking it into the spine to stay where it is, then shuts the book.

He leaves soon after that, telling Hannibal and Will the Wi-Fi password, and everything else they need to know. Will shows him to the door, and as soon as it's shut, Hannibal is right behind him, the business card held up between two fingers.

"That's your whole thing isn't it? You would get the business cards of your victims?" Will asks. "You had that entire rolodex in your kitchen."

Hannibal nods once, but Will can tell that's not the answer to the question he was asking. No, Hannibal wants to know why Will asked in the first place, why he's on the radar as a future victim.

“He’s going to recognize us,” Will whispers. “We should kill him before the news shows us again.”

Hannibal shrugs. He leaves the front hallway, and Will follows closely behind, but not too closely. In the study, Hannibal is sitting at the desk by the time Will comes in, his tablet open in front of him.

He goes and stands behind Hannibal as he types in their names, pulling up search results. He shows Will the dates on every article and sees that no one has reported on them besides Freddie Lounds in about a month now. That’s a relief.

“So you think we don’t need to kill him?” Will asks. “Are you sure?”

Hannibal nods, then writes on the notepad set beside his tablet: *It would draw attention back to us. Even if they don’t know it’s us, they might bring us up thinking it is possible. Being his recent customers, we would be questioned as well.*

“Okay,” Will sighs. “Well, I’m going to be in my room reading what Freddie Lounds has said about us. Come get me for lunch?”

Hannibal frowns, then gestures to the various sitting places in the study.

“Oh I don’t—” Will starts, but Hannibal frowns even deeper, and Will can’t help but sigh, and say, “Okay, I’ll be right back.”

He gets his laptop from his room and finds himself on the couch in the study, searching up Tattlecrime to see what’s been written about them. It’s weird sitting there with Hannibal while they do different things in the same room. He hears shuffling of paper, and glances up to see him writing things down, and moving things around.

Will doesn’t bother asking what he’s working on, but he guesses it has something to do with money or properties.

For the first time since they went over the cliff, he is able to see what's reported on them. It took them weeks to find the house on the bluff, and Francis Dolarhyde’s mutilated corpse. A slideshow of photos show just how much Hannibal carved off of him before they left, and there’s more blood on the ground than there is corpse left, it seems.

“You took a lot,” Will says.

He glances up and sees Hannibal smiling down into the papers in front of him.

He clicks on an article, the first one written after that night, even before the house was found.

Murder Husbands Take Their Leave

It seems that Will Graham’s plan to ‘fake’ Hannibal Lecter’s escape wasn’t so fake, afterall. Will Graham, former FBI profiler, and Hannibal Lecter, convicted serial killer and cannibal, are nowhere to be found after the convoy was intercepted.

Several dead, and one police cruiser missing from the scene. Bullets found in the dead officers match bullets that came from other victims of Francis Dolarhyde.

It is unknown whether Will Graham worked with the Tooth Fairy to set Lecter free, or if the Tooth Fairy has taken them both hostage. All we know is that these three men are dangerous.

He reads another, written a month ago, just after the house was found.

Tooth Fairy Bites It

The corpse—or what is left of it—of Francis Dolarhyde was found on the patio of a house overlooking a cliff. Video evidence was uncovered of the battle that went down and it is clear that both Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham killed the Tooth Fairy, or as he called himself, the Great Red Dragon.

In this footage, we see Will Graham embrace Hannibal Lecter and pull both of their bodies off the cliff. To their deaths, right? Wrong. Fastforwarding through the footage, we see them emerge from the darkness and back into the house, soaking wet, and covered in blood. Will Graham can be seen being dragged through the house, less than half conscious.

Bloody footprints and sheets show that both men made it into one of the bedrooms, and even further to the shower.

The camera ran out of film before they could come back into the main area of the house, but it is assumed Hannibal Lecter carved pieces of Dolarhyde's body sometime after this.

It is yet unknown where they could have gone, but it is assumed by the FBI and medical professionals that they likely have not survived their injuries, and if they have, they could not have gotten far with such injuries. The search is being focused in the United States until the FBI finds any indication they are elsewhere.

Will doesn't really buy it. He thinks Jack probably wants people to think it's not as bad as he thinks it is. He knows that Will wanted to run away with Hannibal all those years ago, and he knows how capable of a doctor, and how resourceful, Hannibal is. He has to know they wouldn't have stayed in the United States.

The rest of the articles just continue to say there haven't been any sightings of them that can be verified. Of course not, though, because they only went in public for the first time two days ago.

Eventually Hannibal stands up and hands Will a list labeled *Lunch Options.* Will can't help but smile, pleased that Hannibal is giving him a choice. Will tells him what he wants, and Hannibal leaves the room.

Even knowing he shouldn't, Will decides to check Molly's social media accounts. Not willing to sign into his own, and possibly ping his location, he can't see anything, as all of her accounts have been put on private. He tells himself that he only wants to check so he can see if she has moved on, but truthfully, he needs to know what she has been saying about him or

Hannibal. Maybe he will ask Chiyoh to log in to his accounts and send him information whenever she gets where she's going.

The next few days go by without any incident. Will keeps a bit of distance from Hannibal, needing a chance to deal with his feelings about living with Hannibal.

He can't stop thinking about how Hannibal told the cable guy they were *married.* They hadn't discussed that at all, nor do their aliases share the same last name. There are other reasons two grown men can live together besides them being married, right?

He doesn't mention it to Hannibal again, but when someone comes to work on fixing something else on the property, later that week, the same thing happens.

Will is showing the man the furnace that apparently needs to be fixed, when he's asked, "Your husband doesn't speak?"

He groans internally, and just says, "No."

After a minute he excuses himself and runs upstairs to find Hannibal in the kitchen.

"What did I fucking tell you?" Will yells. He realizes how loud he is, and lowers his voice so the man downstairs can't hear him, and mumbles, "We're not fucking married."

Hannibal just shrugs.

"I can't pretend to be married to you, Hannibal," Will tells him. "I just can't, okay?"

Hannibal turns around and begins chopping something at the other counter.

Without another word, Will goes up to his room and packs a bag. He can't stay at home tonight, not with all these feelings circulating in his head. He can't be expected to eat dinner with Hannibal tonight, and sit in silence, when all he wants to do is hear the other man talk, and help him, and tell him how to process these feelings. He *can't.*

He passes through the kitchen on the way out, showing Hannibal that he has a bag, and is walking out the front door. He doesn't say anything on the way out, not telling Hannibal when he'll be back, or why he's going. If Hannibal can be silent, then Will is going to be, as well.

He ends up the next town over, and checks into a hotel using the credit card Hannibal gave him the second they arrived in France, and leaves his bag in the room. He ends up wandering around for a while, looking for a restaurant, or for something to do. He receives text after text from Hannibal, asking when he will be home, but he never responds to any of them.

He knows it's a terrible idea, but if Hannibal wanted to come find him, he could check his bank account, and come get him. He doesn't need to keep texting Will over and over. It's just distracting, and he can't believe that Hannibal Lecter, of all people, has stooped to that level of clinginess.

Will tries to send the night away from home, but it doesn't help him at all, nor does he make it as long as he wanted to. While he wanted it to be a chance to be free of Hannibal, and to have a chance with his own thoughts, he finds himself unable to think. Well, that's not true because thinking is all he does—about Hannibal calling them husbands, about Hannibal doing it even after Will told him not to, about how he really might love Hannibal. He can't stop, and finds himself packing up his bag and going home by ten PM.

He finds Hannibal in the living room, tears streaming down his face, the bottle of whiskey he gifted Will nearly empty in his hand. Hannibal looks up at Will when he walks into the room, and the pain and betrayal is evident.

Hannibal thought he was never coming back.

He feels tears forming in his own eyes, and his throat and chest tighten to an uncomfortable level. He can't let Hannibal see him so vulnerable, he decides. He turns away from him in the doorway, ready to flee, but decides he has just one thing to say.

"I'm never going to leave you, Hannibal," Will tells him, then he leaves the room to let Hannibal sober up.

He goes into his own room, and unpacks his bag, crawling into bed in just his boxers and a t-shirt to sleep.

Having never been a heavy sleeper, Will wakes to the sound of his door creaking open. He opens one eye, the light from the hall much too bright for both of them to be open, and sees the shape of Hannibal's body in the doorway.

"Han'bl?" Will mumbles. "You okay?"

No response, not that Will expected one. He can feel anxiety pouring off of Hannibal in waves, hears the creaking of the floorboards as he shifts on uncertain feet, and immediately understands. The man in the doorway is hesitant, and Will knows he is unsure if he's allowed to come in, especially since Will left earlier to seek distance.

"Come in," Will says. "You can come sleep with me."

It takes a second before Hannibal unsticks his feet from the floor and walks into the room. He turns and shuts the door again and Will opens both eyes in the darkness, watching the figure walk carefully around the room to the other side of the bed.

Will rolls over and lifts the blanket on the other side to welcome Hannibal into the safety of his bed. Hannibal sits there, cross legged and body rigid.

After putting Hannibal through what he did today—leaving him and making him worry he would never come back—he feels he has no choice but to make it up to him. In any way Hannibal needs him to.

"Nightmare?" Will asks.

He thinks he can see Hannibal nod in the dark.

“What do you need from me?” Will asks, resting his head back down on the pillow. He doesn’t expect a verbal response, but he knows if Hannibal doesn’t need anything it will be clear. He will roll away and face the opposite direction and Will would know not to push. If Hannibal *does* need something, that may be trickier.

One of Hannibal’s trembling hands reaches out toward Will, then drops to the mattress, but Will knows.

“It’s okay,” Will whispers. “Whatever you need.”

Hannibal reaches out again and taps Will’s mouth with one finger, surprising Will immensely. In the dark, Will can just barely make out Hannibal tapping his ear a few times with fingers on his other hand.

“You want me to talk?” Will guesses, to which Hannibal nods. He breathes out air he didn’t know he was holding onto, then asks, mostly to himself. “What about?”

Hannibal sets a hand on Will’s chest, then lifts it to drive the point home by pointing at him, poking his chest.

“Me?” Will asks. He exhales, blowing air up into his bangs, thinking about what he could possibly say to the scared man in his bed right now. “Alright, lay down at least.”

Hannibal does, laying on his side, facing Will. There’s several inches of space between them, and Will wants to close the distance, but if that’s not what Hannibal has already done, then that is not what Hannibal needs from him.

“Okay,” Will whispers. “We haven’t— *I* haven’t discussed the night on the cliff yet. I could start—”

He’s cut off by Hannibal pressing a hand gently to his mouth, shaking his head profusely. He mouths the word *no,* and Will feels a pang of regret for bringing it up. There’s fear and pain and lingering betrayal on Hannibal’s face.

“Was that what your nightmare was about?” Will whispers when Hannibal moves his hand away.

Hannibal nods, just a single incline of his head. He scoots closer, leaving two less inches between them. Now, there’s barely six inches of space between their bodies, and Hannibal hesitates, glancing up at Will, then back to his neck.

“Hey,” Will soothes. “Whatever you need. I mean that.”

A hand reaches out in the dark and settles on Will’s chest again. Hannibal points to himself, then, opens his mouth as if he expects words to finally come out, then closes it again. He presses harder against Will’s chest, then brings the hand down to Will’s hip and squeezes, then withdraws it and points to himself again.

“Yeah, okay,” Will whispers. He hopes he understands the request.

He closes the distance between them and wraps an arm around Hannibal's waist, pulling their bodies together. Hannibal's face goes straight to Will's chest, his arms stay folded into his own.

He leans heavily into Will, noses at the shirt his face is pressed against. He moves one arm and grasps Will's wrist, pulling Will's arm tighter around him, just how he wants it. He shakes in Will's embrace, as if being touched is something so new and foreign that his body doesn't quite know how to respond.

Touch-starved, Will's brain tells him. Reminds him of how he used to be. Not so much anymore, not since he was married and Molly was very tactile with him, even if he couldn't find it in him to reciprocate all the time. Even if he wasn't in love with Molly in the ways she was in love with him, it's impossible not to acknowledge all the ways she helped him during the three years Hannibal was in prison. It's hard to let that type of friendship go.

"You aren't accustomed to fear," Will murmurs. He yawns, then mumbles, "Nothin' wrong with being scared sometimes. God knows I deal with mass amounts of fear every day. Hell, I'm sharing a home with *you.* That's scary as shit."

Hannibal tenses and shifts in his embrace, as if trying to withdraw and leave, but Will makes shushing sounds, and holds him tighter.

"I'm not scared of *you*," Will whispers, quickly amending his statement. "I'm scared of the situation we're in. I'm scared that I'll never hear your voice again. I'm scared that one of us is going to be arrested or killed. I'm scared I don't live up to your expectations. I'm scared of a lot of things *because* of you, but I'm not scared *of* you. Not anymore."

Hannibal settles again and Will can feel his lips moving against his chest. He wonders what Hannibal is trying to say. What he would say, if he just could.

Without thinking about it, Will kisses the top of Hannibal's head.

It pulls the first sound he's heard from Hannibal in two months from the older man's throat. A soft whimper, nothing more. It rings in Will's ears, music in the otherwise silent room.

"Goodnight, Hannibal," Will whispers, unable to further address the kiss, or if it means anything. "We should both sleep."

A kiss is pressed to his chest, along with a nod of Hannibal's head. He clutches at the waistband of Will's boxers, tugging their hips closer together. Hannibal tangles one leg between Will's, so that they're touching as much as they can. It's beyond intimate, and Will feels warm all over.

He keeps trying to convince himself that he isn't attracted to Hannibal physically, but he decides that he likes this closeness between them. He likes *cuddling* with Hannibal Lecter. If Jack could see the two of them now he would have an aneurysm. And if not that, then he would spend the rest of his life wondering how this could have happened. Because Jack believed Will was his man until the very end—too trusting, even as Will helped orchestrate Hannibal's escape. Now, tangled with Hannibal in bed, feeling his warmth, and his steady

breaths, and feeling completely safe in the arms of a killer, he knows *exactly* whose man he is.

Will wakes up after the best sleep he's had in his life to find his bed empty. He momentarily thinks the entire thing was a dream, but the pillow next to him smells like Hannibal. He buries his face in it and inhales deeply, trying to remember the smell of having the man so close and vulnerable in a way that Will can't imagine anyone else has ever seen.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> Sorry I took a weekend off, and sorry that I'll probably take next weekend off, too. As soon as No One Knows is done, I'll have more time for this one and I'll upload weekly, but it's easier for me to write this one every other week at the moment. Please leave comments and kudos!

The days go on as they have been. They sometimes go to the market together, or sometimes Will is given a list and sent alone. They sit in the living room and watch TV, or read their books, or sometimes Hannibal sits at the piano in the corner and composes. Other days, they'll swim laps in the pool together, and Will always catches Hannibal staring at him.

Their days are sometimes spent together, or apart, only converging for joint meal times on the days spent on their own.

Nights are the same. Some nights Hannibal goes off to his own room to sleep, but other nights he follows Will right into his bedroom and gets into Will's large bed.

He doesn't ask—not that he could verbalize the question—but Will doesn't need him to. He would say yes no matter what.

There are nights when they go their separate ways, only for Hannibal to knock on the door in the middle of the night. Will tells him to come in on those nights, opens his arms and lets Hannibal into his space.

Those nights, when Hannibal comes in a bit later, are the nights that he shakes, and when tears stream down his face. Will wipes those tears away, but doesn't mention them otherwise. To see Hannibal so vulnerable feels like a gift.

The nights Hannibal doesn't come in, Will doesn't see him until late morning. He doesn't check on him those mornings, figuring Hannibal just needs some days to sleep in. Will makes breakfast on those mornings.

He broaches the subject on one of those mornings.

"You can sleep in my bed every night if you want to," he says. "I know some days you like sleeping in, but don't feel like you can't do that in my room, yeah? You don't have to leave before I wake up."

Hannibal nods twice, looking down at his plate as he cuts the sausage Will cooked into tiny pieces.

“If you don’t want to, that’s fine, too,” Will adds quickly. “I know you’re used to sleeping alone. I was just thinking that you don’t have to. I’m used to having another body in bed with me.”

He winces, instantly regretting the mention of Molly.

Hannibal reaches across the table and gives Will’s hand a gentle squeeze. A reassurance that he understands, and that it’s okay. He withdraws much too soon and opens up the newspaper he had sitting next to him.

A smile forms on Hannibal’s face, his eyes brightening from what he reads. He picks up a pen and circles something then hands the newspaper over to Will.

It’s an ad for a fishing supply store for sale.

“What are the odds?” Will mutters under his breath. He sees the starting bid and asks, “Can we afford that?”

Hannibal nods.

He picks up his pen and writes down the word ‘*Call’* and then writes down banking information and a few other notes like, ‘*Use your alias,’* and *‘Don’t be afraid to double if there are other offers.’*

And that’s how, several meetings, tons of phone calls, and even more research, later, Hannibal and Will own their own shop.

It turns out the previous owner died in an accident at the nearby docks. The son supposed to inherit the business wants nothing to do with it. It turns out the shop comes with two employees, both waiting to hear if they’re still keeping their jobs under the new ownership.

Will wastes no time calling them both to assure them they’ll keep their jobs. He also, upon Hannibal’s suggestion, tells him he’ll be sure to cover all missed wages while the shop has been closed.

This whole process takes about a week for Will to finalize, and during that week, Hannibal slips into bed with him at the same time Will turns in. Some nights Hannibal stays on his own side of the bed, but other nights he ends up in the center, silently asking for Will’s comforting touch. Some nights Will wakes up to him thrashing in his sleep, breathing ragged, chest heaving. He manages to wake Hannibal gently, and the man instantly buries his face in Will’s chest.

Each morning, though, he’s gone before Will can even wake.

And then Will goes to work on his first day as the new owner. Having never actually met his new employees yet, he stops in the doorway and grabs Hannibal’s arm beside him when he sees the young girl at the counter.

He recognizes her as the girl from the park the week they finally settled in France. The girl that reminded him of Abigail.

He unsticks himself from the floor when she turns to look at him and Hannibal both. He knows from the phone call that she speaks English, which is quite the relief. He'll stumble over his words, as it is, trying to push thoughts of Abigail from his mind.

"Good morning. I'm the new owner, Wallace," Will says to her. He looks down at the hand still grasping Hannibal's forearm, then adds, "This is my husband, Henry. He will be helping out around here, but he can't speak. If you have any questions, or need help, he can write down answers, or you can come to me. Otherwise, I would assume you know the ins and outs of this shop, and will be the one helping us."

"I'm Amelie," the girl says. She points to the boy next to her. "This is Remy."

"Pleased to meet you both," Will says.

He finally lets go of Hannibal's arm, stepping further into the shop. He goes to the office in back to take a look around, and can see Hannibal moving through the shop with his head down. No doubt trying to avoid everyone else's eyes for the moment. Will wonders if he noticed the resemblance between Amelie and Abigail. He wonders if he catches it each time Amelie turns her head and looks exactly like the dead girl from behind.

He wonders if Hannibal feels anything about that.

Around noon, Will closes up the shop and gives everyone an hour for lunch.

"You want to go home for lunch?" Will asks.

Hannibal shakes his head and gestures for Will to follow him.

They end up walking down the street to a restaurant, walking side by side, but not touching. The weather is nice, and Will watches Hannibal close his eyes and turn his face up toward the sky, basking in the warmth from the sun.

"You were stuck inside for three years," Will remembers. "Must feel really nice to finally be out. I mean, when I was locked away, it was only a fraction of the amount of time you were, and it was cold as shit when I got out, but… it was still… well, you know."

Hannibal nods and reaches out to hold Will's hand while they walk.

They haven't mentioned any public displays of affection. Will had been worrying all week if he'd even introduce Hannibal as his husband. He decided, in the end, it was the easiest explanation for his employees as to why they are constantly together, and come and go together each day.

His instinct is to rip his hand out of Hannibal's grasp, but he allows it for the rest of the walk.

When they sit down at the table, Hannibal releases Will's hand and pulls a pen and paper from his pocket. He writes a sentence down, then passes it to Will.

Chiyoh is coming to visit tomorrow.

“Okay,” Will says. “How long is she staying?”

Hannibal holds up three fingers.

“Days?”

A nod.

“Do you think she’d be willing to send a letter for me? From a different country, I mean.”

Hannibal looks thoughtful for a second, then nods. It’s clear he wants more information, and Will supposes he shouldn’t deny him.

“I want to send Molly a letter,” Will clarifies. “I don’t want her to think I might come back some day, and I want to tell her to move on.”

Hannibal nods again.

Will orders for both of them after Hannibal points on the menu to show him. He can tell this is all hard for Hannibal, so he tries not to draw attention toward the fact that Hannibal can’t speak.

After lunch, they still have some time before they need to get back to the shop, so they stop at the market. Will gets some junk food for the house, expecting Hannibal to throw him disapproving glances, but none come his way. Hannibal holds the basket and instead of disapproving, he mostly looks… sad.

“You okay?” Will asks. He doesn’t expect an honest answer, but he can tell right away that something is wrong.

Hannibal nods again, and offers him a weak smile. He checks his watch, then shows it to Will. They need to get back to the shop soon to reopen.

“You don’t have to be okay, you know,” Will says as he starts putting the contents of their basket on the conveyor belt. “You don’t have to pretend.”

Hannibal’s face stays exactly the same, completely unreadable. His face doesn’t so much as twitch for the rest of the day. Will thinks that he has made a huge mistake by pointing it out, but when Will is ready for bed that night, Hannibal comes up with him and crawls into bed beside him. He rests his head on Will’s shoulder, and puts a hand on his stomach.

His fingers push the hem of Will’s shirt up so he can trace the length of the scar on Will’s abdomen. Back and forth, back and forth. Will feels arousal pooling in his gut, right under Hannibal’s wandering fingers.

But that can’t be right because he doesn’t think he’s sexually attracted to Hannibal. *No,* Will thinks. *I’m just lonely. And this feels good.*

But it’s not *right.* Because he’s not into men, and being aroused by Hannibal’s hand on his body is just him being confused by the situation they’re in. He associates a delicate touch in

bed with his wife. Not that he ever let her touch the scar on his abdomen. Because it wasn't *hers* to touch. But that's all beside the point.

What this is—Will is just associating his present with his past, with his life back home. It's not real, even if it feels *too* real.

In order to stop himself from actually getting hard from Hannibal's touches, he rolls over onto his side, knocking Hannibal's hand and head away as he moves to face away from him.

"Goodnight, Hannibal," Will says.

Hannibal doesn't reach out to pull him back, nor does he attempt to move toward him. In fact, Hannibal turns away entirely, shifting on the mattress, and pulling the blanket as he goes.

In the morning, Will is pressed against Hannibal's back, arm tight around his middle. Apparently in his sleep, he was unable to stay on his own side of the bed, and gravitated toward Hannibal's warm body. And he's hard.

"Shit," he mutters.

He throws himself out of bed before Hannibal can wake up and notices the erection pressed to his ass, and runs to the bathroom.

He showers, willing his cock to go soft, unwilling to jerk himself off with Hannibal asleep in the room next to him. He realizes this is the first time he's gotten up before Hannibal has on any of the mornings they shared a bed. And of course he wakes up hard. He pauses as he reaches for his shampoo, and wonders if Hannibal's ever woken up to Will in the same state.

Of course he wouldn't mention it if he had. And *of course* he would leave the room before Will could wake up and feel embarrassed.

He spends more time in the shower than he normally does, then decides to shave his face and trim his hair after, hoping that Hannibal will be awake and out of the room by the time he emerges.

Will doesn't know if he can face the disappointment Hannibal no doubt feels after the rejection last night. Not that Will meant it as a rejection. Because Hannibal likely didn't mean it as a proposition. But that's how it feels. And he's sure Hannibal will see it as a rejection.

Anything you need, Will has said to him night after night. And when Hannibal needed… whatever that was… Will turned away from him, leaving him to sleep on his own side of the bed. Only to end up pressed against his back by morning. It almost feels hypocritical. Hypocritical that he wouldn't allow Hannibal the contact he desired, but then took what he wanted himself.

He feels like shit for it.

He shouldn't, not after everything Hannibal has ever done to him. This pales in comparison to a gutting, to his head being sawn open, to their surrogate daughter being killed, to him

being framed, to *everything*.

But he does know that he isn't innocent either. Their relationship is give and take—they both give, and they both take away. They take away everything they give to each other. So maybe this is no different.

He's given Hannibal hope that their relationship is progressing into something different, and he's taken that hope away the second things felt too real and confusing for him.

Will emerges from the bathroom and is relieved to find that Hannibal has left already. He dresses quickly and leaves his room.

"I'm heading to the shop," Will calls out, hoping Hannibal is in the kitchen and can hear him as he runs from the house.

He spends his morning repairing motors and restocking shelves. He's glad that Hannibal's safehouse they are currently living in is in a more populated tourist area. Business is good with him being one of the few shops so close to the harbor.

Hannibal comes in with Chiyoh at noon, a lunch tote in his arms. Hannibal turns and locks the door after scanning the room. No customers at the moment, fortunately.

"We have brought lunch for everyone," Chiyoh announces when they reach the counter.

Remy and Amelie look surprised by the gesture, but ultimately happy about it. Will hears murmurs about them being glad they won't have to buy their own lunch today. He makes a note to give them both raises. He has the books from the last few months and knows the shop can afford it. He thinks that the previous owner told them it could not. Even if the shop were not doing so well, Will would have no problem dipping into his and Hannibal's finances to pay them more.

"How do you know Wallace and Henry?" Amelie asks Chiyoh.

"Henry is a childhood friend," Chiyoh answers. She doesn't elaborate, nor does she attempt to make any more conversation with the young woman. She looks at Will who stands at the bait fridge, rearranging the items within. "Please come eat."

"Not hungry," Will mutters. "I have some work to do in the office."

He doesn't have anything to do, but goes in and shuts the door behind him. He knows he can't avoid Hannibal forever, but he needs space for now. If he can't get it tonight—he can't very well rescind the offer of letting Hannibal sleep with him every night so soon after offering—then he will get it today.

Hannibal has Chiyoh to keep him company today.

He pulls out a piece of paper and a pen and begins writing a letter to Molly.

Molly,

He writes.

I'm only writing this letter to let you know that I am still alive, and that I will not be coming back. I've found a life with Hannibal, and as fragile as our relationship is, I'm happy. I'm alive, and I am happy, and I hope that you can accept this, and eventually move on.

I will find a way to send you some money—god knows I have enough of it now— so you are not completely left on your own for the time being.

Maybe one day our paths will cross again, but our marriage is over. I promise I won't come for you, and neither will he. You're safe, and so is your son.

There will be no return address on this letter, and it will be sent from far away from us. Please, if you know what is good for you, do not come looking for me. Do not tell Jack we've had any correspondence. Please just let me go.

And please know that even if Hannibal gets put back in prison, he will find a way out. It's no use to lock him away again, but as long as I'm with him, it's better. He and I will have to make negotiations, but if he ever kills again, I won't allow it to be anyone innocent. If anything gives you comfort, let it be the fact that you are saving innocent lives by allowing us to move on together.

Will

He doesn't know how much of that last paragraph is true, but he writes it anyway. It'll be easier if she thinks she isn't responsible for the deaths of people who did nothing wrong. He also knows that telling her they won't come for her will make it so much easier to get Winston when the time comes. It's not realistic to ask for him in this letter because she won't be able to respond or get Winston to him, but when someone does show up to take him, she will hopefully feel safe enough to let it happen.

A knock on the door spooks Will, and he quickly shoves the letter into an envelope.

"Come in," he says, clearing his throat.

The door opens to reveal Chiyoh standing on the other side.

"Hannibal says you want to send a letter," she says.

Will nods and holds up the envelope. "I need to address it."

"I will mail it from Lithuania."

"Are you still living there?" Will asks.

"No," Chiyoh answers. "I am living in France, just a few miles away. Hannibal wishes for me to find some items from the castle, and I have not been since I left."

"Oh," Will breathes. "What did he need you to get?"

“He hasn’t said yet.”

Will nods in acceptance, but he has to admit he's surprised Hannibal wants anything to do with any part of that castle.

“Must be damn important,” Will mutters.

Chiyoh nods just once, then changes the subject. “He wants you to eat lunch. You have not eaten since dinner last night.”

“Not hungry,” Will tells her.

She sighs, and shuts the door behind her, stepping further into the office.

“Hannibal is worried about you,” Chiyoh says, sitting in the chair across from the desk.

“He said that?” Will scoffs.

“He didn’t have to.”

Another knock on the door, but Hannibal doesn’t wait for an answer before barging into the room. He’s holding a tupperware in his hand, and sets it down in front of Will. He makes a few hand movements at Chiyoh, who nods and stands.

“You know sign language?” Will asks.

Hannibal nods and smiles. He takes Chiyoh’s spot in the chair across from him, and Chiyoh leaves the room. Hannibal points to the letter still in Will’s hands, and holds his hand out to ask for it.

“What? Why?” Will asks, pulling it back to his chest.

Hannibal sighs in irritation and moves his hand forward again, emphasizing his request to see it.

“I don’t want you to read it,” Will says. “It isn’t for you.”

Hannibal scoffs. He picks up a piece of paper off the desk and grabs Will’s pen from in front of him. He writes something down quickly, but Will can still tell that what’s being written is quite lengthy. He braces himself for the onslaught of words, and for the facial expressions that Hannibal will throw at him while he reads them.

He pushes it toward Will, then sits back in the chair and crosses his arms.

Will crumples it up and throws it in the garbage can without reading it.

“Sorry, did you say something to me?” Will taunts. “Oh no, I didn’t see that paper anywhere. Maybe it never existed.”

He knows it's a terrible idea, but if Hannibal could do shit like that to him while his brain was on fire, then Will doesn't really give a fuck.

Hannibal stands up abruptly, slamming a hand down on the desk.

"Oh, you're gonna throw a tantrum?" Will asks. "Why don't you fucking gut me again, then? Here's a blade."

Will slides a letter opener across the desk to him and leans back in the chair with his hands behind his head, leaving his stomach free for the blade that Hannibal now clutches in his hands.

The letter opener clatters to the ground, and Hannibal turns around, leaving the room. Will thinks he can almost see smoke coming from his ears.

The front door bell jingles harshly, and Will hears the door slam shut again.

"If you need to go home, we can handle the shop," Amelie says, poking her head into the office. "We had to run things around here a lot before."

"No, no. I don't need to go home," Will says. "Sorry. He just had something urgent to do."

Amelie nods, but lingers in the doorway.

"Did you need something?" Will asks.

He sees the girl shift awkwardly on her feet, biting her lip in a nervous gesture.

"Come in, come in," Will says.

She moves into the room and shuts the door behind her.

"I was hoping I could ask you…" she says, trailing off. "If it's no trouble, uh, I need a few days off next week."

"Oh, yeah, no problem," Will assures her. He picks up the calendar Hannibal insisted on buying for them, and clicks his pen to write it down. "What days?"

"Oh," Amelie says, surprised. "Um, Wednesday through Sunday."

Will nods, writing it down. He bites on the end of his pen and regards her, contemplating. He has a good feeling as to why she was scared to ask, but he doesn't want to push the already nervous girl into divulging information.

"That's very kind of you. *Merci, Monsieur,"* she says quickly.

She stands up and turns to go, but Will calls out to her.

"Please, Amelie, sit," Will says, gesturing to the chair in front of his desk again. "Tell me about the previous owner."

“Oh, well, he was… nice,” she says hesitantly.

“Did he give you days off?” Will asks.

“Not very many. There were only two of us working because he couldn’t afford to hire anyone new, he said. I would hate to take time off and leave Remy to run the shop on his own,” she tells him. “The owner was busy often.”

“I’ve checked the books for the last several months. He could have hired a staff of six and still pulled in a good profit,” Will tells her. “Which is why I want to give the two of you a raise, and hire another employee or two.”

“A raise?” she asks. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure,” Will smiles. “And I’ll be sure to pay you for the vacation you’re taking next week.”

She tries to keep her smile from forming, but Will sees the twitch of her lips. She reminds him so much of Abigail it hurts. There’s an ache in his chest remembering the girl he swore to protect, but couldn’t. Amelie isn’t Abigail, but Will still feels like he owes her something.

“Anything you need, don’t be afraid to ask,” Will tells her. “Your previous employer didn’t seem to be very good at his job, but remember that I am not him. You can come to me and Ha—me and Henry at any time. We’ll be here most days.”

Amelie thanks him again and he finally lets her go, not holding her for interrogation about her previous boss any longer. One thing he knows for sure, though, is that the other guy didn’t seem like a good guy. Rude, for sure.

And it hits Will immediately.

Hannibal killed the previous owner.

Will shakes his head. It was an *accident.* The man fell off the docks and hit his head. Rumor has it he was drunk, and often. It could have happened to anyone on a slippery dock with too much to drink. It could happen to someone stone cold sober. Will saw plenty of men go down and almost not come back up throughout his childhood following his dad from boatyard to boatyard.

It still sits in the back of his mind, though. Would Hannibal really kill someone just to get Will his shop?

No, Will tells himself. Hannibal wouldn’t waste his first kill after prison on something like that. Someone he couldn’t display or eat. He wouldn’t.

Except, Will remembers. *That wasn’t his first kill.*

Francis Dolarhyde was the first, and now it’s quite possible Hannibal killed the owner of this shop to get it for Will.

“Goddammit,” Will mutters.

He doesn’t have any proof, so he isn’t going to accuse him of it, but he’ll keep an eye out. He can’t deny the gratitude spreading through his entire body at the gesture, assuming that is really what happened.

He decides to pull the crumpled paper out of the waste basket and unfolds it. He smooths it out on the desk, and begins to read.

I only wish to read the letter to see if there is anything you should add. I need to be sure your ex wife has no incentive to come after us, and that she will not want to hand the letter over to Jack. I think it would be beneficial to us for you to offer her money. I will even go as far as setting up an account for her untraceable to us. If you don’t want me to read it, then fine, but at least write that information down.

Will sighs, throwing the paper back into the garbage. He didn’t want Hannibal to see it because he was scared about Hannibal seeing the part about the money, or the part where he told Molly there won’t be any killing. But now he understands that he and Hannibal are on the same page about how to keep their freedom for the time being.

“You know what?” Will says, stepping out of the office. “On second thought, I do think I need to get home to my husband.”

Amelie and Remy both nod and Will says his farewells.

When he gets home he finds Chiyoh and Hannibal in the living room. Hannibal is signing to her while she responds in hushed tones. Will doesn’t know any more sign language than the alphabet, and Chiyoh’s voice is so soft he can’t hear her, but he has a feeling they’re talking about him.

The second they notice him Chiyoh’s lips, and Hannibal’s hands, stop moving.

Will stands in the doorway, and scratches the back of his neck. “I’m, uh, I just wanted to say I’m sorry for earlier.”

Hannibal nods, and Will knows that’s both a sign of forgiveness and dismissal, so he nods himself and leaves the room.

After dinner, Will goes for a swim in the backyard, and when he emerges from the pool, he sees Hannibal watching him from inside the sliding glass door. He dries off his face with the towel on the lounge chair, and when he pulls the towel away, Hannibal is no longer standing at the door.

Will goes to his room and showers, and when he comes out, Hannibal is asleep in his bed, curled up on his own side. Will lays down on his own side and turns off the lamp. He just hopes everything is okay between them. It’s so hard to know because there’s no such thing as the silent treatment when Hannibal’s silence is ongoing and constant.

“Will.”

“Huh?” Will questions, jolting awake.

“I’m leaving today. I need your letter,” Chiyoh says.

Will wakes up more fully, realizing that Hannibal is wrapped around his body, arm over his chest, a leg thrown over his own.

“I thought you were staying three days?” Will asks, rubbing his eyes.

“I have decided not to. The letter,” she repeats.

“What time is it even?” Will grumbles. He opens his nightstand drawer and hands her the envelope.

“The address?”

“Do you have a pen?”

Chiyoh walks around the bed and grabs the one off Hannibal’s nightstand, sitting on top of a journal Will hasn’t noticed before.

She tosses the pen at him. Will has to turn on his side to put the envelope on his nightstand while he writes the address, and Hannibal lets out a desperate whimper in his sleep and holds Will tighter. It’s the first noise he’s heard from Hannibal in a long time, but that’s not what he’s noticing most right now. The unmistakable line of a hard cock is pressed against his backside, so he tries to pull away just a bit, but Hannibal scoots closer.

“Hannibal,” Will warns.

The man sleeps, seemingly satisfied to just be pressed against Will.

Chiyoh leaves the room as soon as Will hands the envelope over to her.

Will extracts himself from Hannibal’s grip and gets out of bed. He uses the restroom, then pulls a robe over his underwear and t-shirt, then goes downstairs to lay on the couch, watching TV.

He wakes later to Hannibal shaking his shoulder and handing him a cup of coffee. No questions about why he moved to the couch, no sad look on his face about the rejection.

“Will you come to the shop with me today?” Will asks.

Hannibal nods and smiles at him. He brings breakfast into the living room and they eat side by side on the couch.

“I am sorry about yesterday, you know,” Will says. “I read the note. I already offered her money, but I… I didn’t want you to think… well, I just didn’t want you to read that.”

Hannibal sets a hand on Will’s knee and gives it a gentle squeeze.

He picks up the pen on the coffee table and writes down on a notepad sitting next to it, '*It's okay, Will. Our relationship has not been easy on either of us, and I won't fault you for getting frustrated with me.'*

"Well, good," Will murmurs. "Thanks."

Hannibal squeezes his knee again, and then gets off the couch to take both of their plates back to the kitchen.

In the coming days, Will spends a lot of his free time looking up resources to learn sign language. It would make it a hell of a lot easier on them both if Hannibal prefers it over writing everything down. He doesn't tell Hannibal what he's doing. He wants it to be a surprise.

One evening he walks past Hannibal's room after dinner, and hears a quiet humming coming from inside. Hannibal is humming. Will stops and presses his ear to the door, and when Hannibal's hums turn into him making a "wuh," sound, Will's heart drops.

Hannibal's trying to speak. Alone in his room, he's trying to relearn how to use his vocal chords, and he's trying to make sounds come out. And the sound happens to be the first sound of Will's name. He listens for just a second longer until the sounds grow hoarse and shaky. There's a frustrated tone to it all. Will hurries down the hall when he hears Hannibal's hand slam down on a surface.

His heart breaks, and he can't stop hearing the sounds in his head, over and over. He can feel Hannibal's frustration even as he closes himself in his own room and crawls into bed. He won't mention any of what he heard to Hannibal.

Usually when Hannibal gets into bed with him, Will hears him come in, but the next morning he wakes up to find him there. He has a hand on Will's chest, gripping his shirt with his fingers. Will can make out blood in the morning light. Under Hannibal's nails, on his fingertips, staining Will's shirt.

Will doesn't wake him up to ask if there's a body in the kitchen. He doesn't wake him up to ask if it's Hannibal's blood, or his own. He doesn't move from where he's laying. He doesn't pull away from the body pressed against his, the face buried in his neck, breathing softly.

He just pulls the blankets back over them both, gently runs his fingers through Hannibal's hair, and tries falling back asleep.

He decides he can ask about it at dinner later.

After the frustration he heard from Hannibal's bedroom, he doesn't blame the man for going out and killing someone. He just hopes he didn't leave prints anywhere.

It's his coping mechanism (a shitty one, Will can admit, but he knows what he has signed up for), and Will hopes that with each corpse, maybe Hannibal will go back to his old self more and more. Maybe it's giving him the confidence he needs to keep going—reminds him that

he’s still just as strong as he used to be, even if a traumatic experience has taken away something he values about himself.

Will presses a kiss to the top of his head, and decides it doesn’t matter why Hannibal is killing. If it gives him more confidence, then great. If Hannibal just does it because he can, then that’s fine, too. That just does not matter to Will at all.

It just matters that Hannibal is still coming to him each night. It matters that, even if he was so exhausted he couldn’t even remove the blood from his fingers, he still found comfort crawling into Will’s bed and falling asleep beside him. That he’s not scared of Will finding out what he has done. Not scared that Will is going to force him out because of it.

What matters most is that Hannibal knows he’s finally been accepted by Will for the killer that he is.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

I reference two movies in this chapter: American Psycho (2000) and Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004). While they're both fairly popular movies, I understand if people haven't seen them, so a bit of a spoiler warning for both of those. They both have to do with the conversations that Hannibal and Will end up having, so it's something I'm not going to be able to effectively section off as a way to avoid spoilers while keeping the content of the fic, unfortunately.

Kind of hesitant about this chapter. Let me know what you think.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will sleeps a while longer, content to be next to Hannibal. When he gets up, Hannibal is curled up in a ball under the blanket. Will can't see his hands now, but he can see the top of his head above the blanket. There's a small cut on his forehead, and Will frowns. Whoever Hannibal killed last night—assuming he killed someone and didn't just get into a regular fight—left him wounded. He doesn't think the Hannibal he knew in Baltimore would ever allow that to happen.

Seeing this, and seeing the blood under Hannibal's nails, reminds Will that he's *not* the same Hannibal from Baltimore. He's not even the Hannibal that turned himself in so Will would know where he was.

He's the Hannibal that sat in a cell for three years, only talking to law enforcement, lawyers, and psychiatrists. The only people he had to talk to were those who wanted their preconceived ideas about him to be confirmed. Even if none of it was true. And *now* Hannibal has someone who wants *him,* and he can't speak. He can't tell Will all the things he's been holding in since that cold day in Wolf Trap.

And it has to be killing him.

What he's doing now is his own form of self destruction, and Will knows that. It's almost as if he wants to be caught again, and this is a cry for help.

It breaks Will's heart.

Hannibal isn't getting what he wants out of his freedom, and—Will shakes the idea out of his head. He can't fathom the thought of Hannibal finding imprisonment preferable to his current situation.

Will decides they need to have a conversation, even if it's one sided. Will needs to address everything from the last few months since they went over the cliff, and he needs to address the last three years. Whether Hannibal can contribute or not matters very little to him, and he knows he needs to make that clear, too.

He needs to make it clear that he is with Hannibal now. Whether Hannibal is the same man he met six years ago, or if he's someone entirely different, Will still needs him too much. He can't survive being separated ever again.

That terrifies him.

Hannibal sleeps much of the day in Will's bed, and Will goes to check on him every once in a while. Every time he steps into the room, his eyes catch the journal sitting on Hannibal's nightstand, a pen sitting over it. He can't help but feel curious about what could be written inside it.

It's not the one he uses for their plans, or to communicate with Will. The only time Will sees it is on that nightstand. It's only there when Hannibal is also there.

He ignores it today, despite the feeling that he needs to read it. It would be an invasion of privacy, Will knows that, but he can't help but feel as though it's calling out to him.

Hannibal gets up mid-afternoon, but still appears to be exhausted. He doesn't bother doing his hair, or shaving, but Will can see that he cleaned up his nails. His bangs cover the gash on his forehead.

"You doing okay?" Will asks from his desk in the living room where he constructs his lures.

Hannibal pats him on the shoulder as he passes, and goes to sit down on the couch. When Will turns to look at him, remembering the answer won't be verbal, Hannibal nods in response.

"You sure? You slept all day," Will presses.

Hannibal nods and waves his hand in dismissal. He picks up a sketchbook from the coffee table, and opens his tin of pencils. Will knows, by the feeling of eyes on the back of his head, that Hannibal is drawing him.

In the early evening, Will receives a call from Remy at the shop, telling him several applications have been dropped off.

"I'm going into the shop to pick up some things," Will tells Hannibal. "Did you want to walk with me?"

Hannibal shakes his head and closes his sketchbook. He stands, stretching slightly, and shaking out his hands. He tilts his head toward the kitchen and raises an eyebrow.

"Dinner?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods.

“Sure. I’ll be back in less than an hour,” Will tells him.

Hannibal offers a smile, and turns toward the kitchen.

Will goes to the shop to see how things are running, and picks up the stack of applications sitting on the desk in the office. He tells Remy to head home early, and closes up the shop himself.

By the time he gets home, Hannibal is already putting food on plates. It appears to be chicken parmesan, but Will is almost certain it’s not actually chicken. He knows he needs to take a more subtle approach to telling Hannibal he knows about him resuming killing. He also knows he needs to make it clear that it is perfectly okay for Hannibal to kill again— he needs to show his acceptance for it.

“You think you’ll start killing again?” Will asks as they sit down across from each other.

Hannibal freezes as he starts to set Will’s plate in front of him. A split second later, he recovers and sets the plate down. Hannibal has already killed someone, and quite possibly more than one. Last night definitely was not the first occurrence, and now he’s almost certain that Hannibal killed the previous shop owner. He has possibly killed someone each time they slept separately. Will would have no way of knowing for sure.

“I’d like to go with you. I want that with you,” Will says, even without the confirmation that Hannibal even has plans to do it again.

Hannibal sits down across from Will and raises an eyebrow at him.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Will laughs. “You didn’t think I’d want that?”

Hannibal shakes his head and looks down into his plate. He picks up his fork and knife and begins cutting into the chicken breast in front of him.

“It’s not like I haven’t killed before,” Will mutters. “I mean, fuck, there’s so much blood on my hands just because I love you too much to turn you in. I mean, clearly this isn’t chicken. I can see that now.”

Somewhere in the middle of Will speaking, Hannibal’s knife and fork drop and clatter on the table. He lifts his head and looks at Will with his lips slightly parted and his eyes wet.

“What?” Will asks.

Hannibal places a hand over his chest, then points at Will, a question evident on his face. His mouth opens to try and form a word and Will’s chest clenches at the frustration on Hannibal’s face when the word won’t come out.

The older man stands and leaves the dining room on quick feet and comes back with the notepad that normally resides on the fridge. He slams it down on the table next to Will, and presses down so hard as he writes that Will thinks the pen might snap between his fingers.

Will looks down at the words as they’re written.

You love me?

Is written in Hannibal's erratic letters. His usually neat and swooping script is nowhere to be seen. It's replaced with shaky, all capital, blocky letters. Ink pools where Hannibal pressed too hard to the paper for too long, and smudges as Hannibal runs a finger over the writing to emphasize the question.

"What?" Will asks, glancing up at Hannibal. Tears flow freely from his eyes now, and Will can't believe what he's seeing. Such a vulnerable display. All because Will said—

What did I even say? Will think very carefully, trying to remember what prompted this, and realizes that, yes, he did let it slip that he loves Hannibal. He didn't mean for it to happen, not now, not so soon. Maybe not ever. He truly didn't think he'd ever give Hannibal the satisfaction, but after months of living with the other man—sharing a home, a bed most nights, meals, and enjoying each other's company—and seeing Hannibal try *so hard* to be good for Will… he doesn't really mind that he's allowed this lapse in his verbal filter.

"Hannibal…" Will breathes. He looks back down at the words on the paper before answering. "Of course I do. I wouldn't be here if I didn't. Don't you know that by now?"

Hannibal picks up the pen again and writes two more words.

Say it.

"I love you, Hannibal," Will whispers.

Hannibal drops to his knees next to Will's chair, and Will is given only enough time to turn before Hannibal is burying his face in Will's stomach. Will leans forward in his chair, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's head because it's the best way he can embrace the man. Hannibal squeezes Will tight around the waist and a sob rips out of his throat.

"Shh," Will soothes. "It's okay."

He doesn't know how to comfort Hannibal like this. He doesn't know what to do when Hannibal lifts the hem of his shirt and starts kissing along the scar on his stomach. He doesn't know what comes next, or where they go from here.

He just knows he loves Hannibal, and that Hannibal loves him back.

It only takes a few minutes before Hannibal is reaching for Will's belt and undoing it with quick fingers. Will darts his hand out to grab Hannibal's and stop him.

"I love you, but I'm not…" Will says, trailing off. "I can't give myself to you like that."

Hannibal pulls himself to his feet without even glancing at Will. He goes off into the kitchen, and Will fixes his belt while he waits.

The other man comes back in the room carrying dessert, sets one down in front of Will, then his own seat. He doesn't sit down yet, and instead grabs the pen and paper again.

Will glances down as he writes two words in his, once again, flawless script.

You're gay.

"I'm not gay," Will says, confused. "I've only been with women. Never even thought about men."

Hannibal sighs. Then he writes a few more words down.

We will talk about it later.

He sits down and begins eating his own dessert. Will looks down and sees it's pie made from the strawberries they picked up from the market a few days ago. Will moans when he takes a bite of it, then immediately feels embarrassed about making that noise in front of Hannibal.

Hannibal is looking down at his plate, obviously avoiding Will's eyes. There's a suffocating sadness coming from him, and Will has to pull in several deep breaths of air before he can even think about speaking.

"Look, Hannibal," Will says. He stabs his fork into the pie, not looking up at Hannibal despite his words. "I've never been with a man, okay? I've never even thought of it. And I don't know… I don't know if I'm sexually attracted to you. I know that I love you. I know I want to share the rest of my life with you… I just don't know if…"

He trails off and shrugs, not wanting to say it again.

Hannibal nods, and Will expects him to reach for his notepad again, but he doesn't. The rest of dessert is spent with no words exchanged between them.

"I can do the dishes," Will says when they finish. "Do you, um... Did you want to watch a movie with me? Or… something."

Hannibal nods, and Will knows the accompanying smile has sadness behind it. He can see it in Hannibal's eyes. He sees it a lot these days, but Will knows that it's because of what transpired over dinner tonight.

Will quickly washes all the dishes and puts them away, then pours himself a glass of whiskey and Hannibal a glass of wine. He carries both glasses into the living room, and Hannibal gives him another sad smile as he accepts his own.

The TV is already on and open to the menu to choose a streaming service, so Will picks up the remote and starts scrolling through all of them. He pauses, still standing beside the couch.

"Have you seen American Psycho?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods once.

"Did you want to watch it again?" Will asks.

The look on Hannibal's face says *absolutely not* and Will smirks.

“Scared I’ll compare you to Patrick Bateman?” Will teases.

Hannibal places a hand in his chest, as if to say ‘ *Who? Me?’* and then shakes his head. He then points at Will.

“*Me?!”* Will scoffs. “No way. The suits, the murder, the money. That’s all you.”

Hannibal clicks a pen and jots a few things down on the notepad in front of him.

- *Repressed homosexual tendencies*
- *Psychosis making him unsure who he has or has not killed*

“First, I’m not repressed. I’m just not gay,” Will says. “Second, the psychosis was a symptom of my encephalitis, something *you* made worse. And now I know who I killed or not. So, no I’m not Patrick Bateman.”

Hannibal writes down another couple of sentences below his short list.

Perhaps neither of us are Patrick Bateman. Pick a different movie. One you’ve never seen.

Will nods and scrolls through the list of movies.

“Patrick Bateman has repressed homosexual tendencies?” Will asks.

Hannibal sighs, and writes down, ‘*I’ll send you an email later,’* which causes Will to laugh.

He keeps scrolling through the list of movies and stops when he sees a title he recognizes but has never seen. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.*

“Molly always told me I would like this one,” Will says quietly.

Hannibal reaches over and takes the remote from his hand. After he transfers it to his other hand, he grabs Will’s with the one closest to him, and tugs. Will takes the hint and sits down on the couch next to Hannibal, leaving a few inches of space between them, but not removing his hand from Hannibal’s grip.

Will considers their proximity while Hannibal clicks play on the movie. He knows he is okay with sleeping nearly on top of each other every night. He knows they often sit on the couch with one of Will’s arms around Hannibal’s shoulders. Sometimes they hold hands as they walk to the shop together, or sometimes Hannibal massages Will’s shoulder in the back office when it gets really bad. They touch—a lot.

It’s always fine, so Will turns his head to look at Hannibal, then down to their hands. He pulls his own out of Hannibal’s and scoots a bit closer, grabbing the blanket next to him as he lifts Hannibal’s arm and settles into his side. Hannibal stiffens beside him for a second before he

lowers his arm to pull Will in closer. Will pulls the blanket over both of them after he pulls his legs up onto the couch, and Hannibal finally fully relaxes.

The movie starts with soft music and a confused and exhausted looking Jim Carrey waking up and kicking his blankets off, much in a way Will does following a nightmare. Hannibal rubs his arm, and Will looks up to see him smirking, knowing they both had a similar idea.

Almost immediately Will knows why Molly would suggest this movie to him. A tired, scruffy man—Joel—no idea where his journal pages went, a line about not being able to make eye contact with women he doesn't know, just as a woman shows up out of nowhere. It feels a little too on the nose. He considers turning it off, feeling as though this is just rubbing into Hannibal's face how Molly found him when he was at such a low point and that they felt instantly connected. Even if Will and Molly's relationship was doomed from the start because of Hannibal's incessant influence on Will's life.

He makes a move for the remote, about to open his mouth to say they should pick something else, but Hannibal grabs his hand again and settles them both on his knee.

"I think we should watch something else," Will says.

Hannibal slides the remote out of Will's reach, and holds him a bit tighter.

"Have you seen this?" Will asks.

Kate Winslet's character, Clementine, on the train is rude in a way Will knows he was during his first meeting with Hannibal, switching up her mood quickly as the conversation shifts.

Hannibal's face doesn't change as Will looks up to him again and it's clear—Hannibal has seen the movie, and he wants Will to see it too. It just feels like an uncomfortable romance movie that hits a bit too close to him for Will. Even more so as he realizes that the way in which the two characters are drawn to each other and interact with each other is more like him and Hannibal, and less like him and Molly.

Will watches as it cuts to Joel crying, and then people looking for him as he walks to his apartment. Watches as he takes a pill and then starts falling and stumbling as he walks through his apartment. Will's felt that way before.

He gets more uncomfortable, unsure where in the timeline the movie really is, but seeing as Clementine doesn't know Joel, seeming as though she is pretending to not know him, and Will has the memory he doesn't want to resurface. The day in Wolf Trap when he sent Hannibal away, when Hannibal went down on his knees in the snow, and turned himself in to the FBI. When he sent Hannibal away and told him he didn't want to know where he was or what he was doing.

"Hannibal, I really think we should—" Will starts.

Hannibal silences him with a hand over his mouth.

When it turns out that Clementine removed all of her memories of Joel, Hannibal leans forward to write down on a piece of paper—

Did you ever wish you could erase me?

Will frowns and sighs. “I tried. Very hard. To never think about you,” Will whispers. “I tried to distract myself with a woman I don’t think I ever loved, and a son that barely talked to me. I wish I could have removed everything, but we’re not a movie, Hannibal. Everything is still there, and that’s just… that’s just the way it is.”

I thought for my entire incarceration, it would be better to close the doors to my memories of you, but I never could. I never truly wanted to. Even the bad memories, darling. I wanted to keep you. I had to.

Will, ignoring the movie, pushes Hannibal back to the couch and throws his arms around his neck, pulling him into a hug. He feels the overwhelming urge to apologize, but he doesn’t. He just wants to sit in silence with Hannibal for a few minutes. If these few months have taught him anything, it’s that they really do not need words in order to communicate.

He pulls back, tears streaking down his own face, and Hannibal brings his hands up to his cheeks to wipe them away, thumbs rubbing under Will’s eyes. Without thinking of it, Will turns his face to lightly kiss Hannibal’s wrist.

He doesn’t know why he did it, and immediately wishes he could take it back, knowing he isn’t ready to move their relationship further. A few kisses to Hannibal’s head after a nightmare, when they’re laying in bed in the dark is a lot different than sitting on the couch watching a romance movie and kissing his hand.

Hannibal leans forward just as Will’s mind is spinning about the fact that that the way they’re facing each other, and the hands on his face could easily lead to a real kiss. He doesn’t want that. Does he?

Lips touch his, and for just a moment, he thinks he does want it, but the moment is lost when one of Hannibal’s hands settles onto his thigh, too high up for comfort. He freaks out, jumping back before the kiss can even become more than a light press of lips. The hand previously on his thigh is yanked back into Hannibal’s own lap, and the hand that was on his cheek falls to the backrest of the couch.

“I’m sorry,” Will whispers. “I’m sorry.”

He gets off the couch and makes a break for his bedroom.

Needing to be alone, and needing Hannibal to not come to him to sleep tonight, Will shuts and locks his door. Hannibal could easily get in if he wanted to, but Will hopes the need for privacy is understood.

Truthfully, he doesn’t know why he was so scared of a kiss between them. He knows Hannibal would never push him further than he was ready to go in a sexual context, but he knows that any step forward is going to make it too real for him. One step forward may as

well be jumping into the deep end. It may as well be throwing himself off another cliff, but this time he doesn't know if he could survive the fall.

There's still *so much* Will has to process. His own feelings for Hannibal, for one. The fight with Dolarhyde and the fall. The last three years without Hannibal. The nearly three years before that of knowing and being hurt by Hannibal.

Then there's… the possibility that Hannibal is right about him being repressed. He goes to his desk and opens his laptop, just sitting there with google open for several minutes. He thinks about taking 'Am I gay?' quizzes, but decides against it. He even considers looking up Hannibal's claims about Patrick Bateman having homosexual tendencies, but he doesn't want to do that, either. Truth be told, he doesn't know where to start because he's been so convinced of his heterosexuality his entire life, that it feels odd for it to become an issue when he's nearly forty.

After many minutes, his phone chimes to see an email, as promised, from Hannibal. He opens it on his computer.

Subject: Free Therapy

Will smiles at that.

I understand that you are having trouble coming to terms with the relationship we share. Be it because you believe yourself to be heterosexual, or be it that you're finding excuses because of who I am, I promise to give you the time you need to understand yourself.

Given the fact that it's difficult for many people to realize they are not cisgender or heterosexual, I have attached several resources on accepting sexuality. Read them at your leisure.

Next, I would like to analyze our relationship, and those of which you have had in the past. I don't think it is presumptuous of me to say that our bond is the most profound you have shared with anyone in your life. I would say the same about myself—there has been no one else like you, and there never will be.

I don't claim to know what your marriage was like, but given the fact that you have just told me you don't think you ever loved her, and given the fact that you and I have left together to start a life, I feel as though you should take a moment to evaluate that relationship. Did it truly mean more to you than her being a consistent presence, and having a safe home?

Due to your empathy, you give what you get. Your wife saw you as a sweet man, and she loved you. While you were with her, did you love her? When you left, did you realize you don't? You left her and came along with me. Surely that means something. I know that you know it does—just putting it out there.

Even with Alana, a relationship that never progressed beyond that kiss you told me about, you immediately came to me to tell me about it after she left. You could have called, and yet you drove an hour in the snow to see me, and tell me. As if you were a partner who cheated and were overwrought with guilt over the act. I've always wondered if your attraction to

Alana had anything to do with all the things I had in common with her. You chose her based on the surface level things you knew of her, most of which could have also been attributed to me. The difference? She's a woman.

You told me you grew up moving around with your father. Always the new kid in town. I wonder if living in the south had anything to do with it. Your father worked on docks surrounded by other men, likely taught you many different ways to 'be a man,' and discouraged anything else. Being the new kid in town likely never allowed you to form strong bonds with other boys, only ever going on meaningless dates with the girls because that's what you were told.

You were never given romantic or sexual attention from a man until me, and now I fear you just don't know how to accept it because the way you empathize with me has never been the way you are able to empathize with others. You're scared because, for the first time, your feelings are entirely your own.

You could be bisexual, you could be gay, you could be anything, or decide to never label yourself, but you're doing yourself a disservice by pretending you're straight, darling. I'd never force you or coerce you, but I do want to encourage you to evaluate your relationships of the past, alongside ours, as well as evaluate the things in which you're attracted to on your own time (if you understand what I am insinuating, of course), and finding some clarity for yourself.

Give it some thought, and I will be here when you are ready. And as promised, I have also attached the analysis of Patrick Bateman's sexuality.

- Hannibal

So perhaps after reading all of that, Will begins to spiral a bit. Everything Hannibal said makes sense to him, and he understands the ways in which his empathy has gotten in between him and his real feelings for people. Hannibal isn't entirely right, though, because Will has definitely been hit on by men before. In bars, or at work, mostly. Places where all the voices are loud and there's too many people to empathize with.

Every time a man did hit on him, though, he did hear his father's voice in the back of his head. He never really thought much of his dad's homophobia, but now that he thinks about it, it was all there. His dad is dead now, though, so what does it matter? Right?

Maybe Hannibal is right about constantly being told the right way to 'be a man,' and maybe he's right that it had an influence on how Will grew up. And maybe Will heard his dad call men 'faggots' and 'queers' one too many times and he thinks his dad is going to come back from the grave to say it to him too. Will doesn't think that can possibly be it, though. Not all of it.

He's had sex with plenty of women. Never saw many of them again afterwards, which always helped him in the moment. No strings attached. Except with Molly, of course. Their sex life wasn't very exciting, though. With her son in the house, it was hard to find time, and when they did, it wasn't crazy, or anything. Lights off, almost always, so he barely even saw her. Oftentimes… Will knows he let his mind drift. Always to Hannibal, but that could be said for any circumstances or situation Will was in. *Not* just sex.

Shit, Will thinks. So maybe there's a strong lack of desire towards women, but that doesn't automatically mean he desires Hannibal in that way.

He knows for certain he enjoys their closeness. He likes sleeping in the same bed as him, and sitting close on the couch. He likes *cuddling* with Hannibal. Maybe… maybe sex could come later.

I'm just scared, Will thinks. *Terrified, in fact.*

He's never had sex with a man, and he's never watched gay porn… well, maybe once or twice, but it was out of curiosity. Not because he was getting off on it. Except, well, maybe he did, but he was already so close by the time he clicked on the video that it doesn't count.

But since he's never been with a man, he feels like he's going to have no idea what the hell he's doing, and what if it isn't good for Hannibal? What if it doesn't feel good to him? *It could hurt,* Will reminds himself.

He can't think about this anymore. He can't.

But he still does, the memory of him waking up aroused, his own hardness pressed against Hannibal's body recently. He thinks of Hannibal doing the same to him when he had to write that address for Chiyoh. He pretended, in the moment, that it didn't turn him on, but it did, and that's why he had to remove himself from the situation. He couldn't let Hannibal know he was aroused by his arousal.

He's losing it.

He does the only thing he ever wants to do while he feels distraught and confused.

He goes to Hannibal.

He's never even been in Hannibal's room before and is surprised to see that the bed is a twin pushed up against the wall. He has no idea why Hannibal would choose the smaller room with the smaller bed, or why, upon arrival, he didn't purchase a new one.

He watches Hannibal sleep for just a moment before he climbs over the sleeping man and situates himself between his body and the wall. He's instantly comforted by the warmth of the man beside him. The constant calmness that he exudes, even as he sleeps and has no idea Will's even there, or in need of comfort.

Hannibal stirs, and turns over to face Will, his eyes still closed, still breathing softly. Will puts an arm around his waist and moves closer, pressing their bodies together. He pulls the

blanket over him, and wraps himself around Hannibal's body.

"Will?" Hannibal murmurs.

Will's heart stops. It's the first sound of Hannibal's voice that he has heard in months. Hannibal isn't even cognizant and won't remember it when he wakes, but Hannibal *spoke.*

"Yeah, it's me," Will whispers. He pushes himself up on one elbow and looks down at Hannibal, once again fully asleep. He brushes Hannibal's hair away from his forehead, running his fingers through it, wondering if Hannibal would allow this if he were awake.

He leans down and presses a soft kiss to the wound on Hannibal's forehead.

"Goodnight Hannibal," Will whispers.

Hannibal is snuggled against him when he wakes, and it's so nice that Will regrets that he promised to open the shop this morning. He leaves with a kiss to the top of Hannibal's head, leaving the tired man to sleep in for just a little bit longer.

Chapter End Notes

I do think exploring the idea of Will possibly being gay is a risk, just because usually I do HC him as bi, but I saw an analysis talking about how there's the possibility he wasn't into women at all if you look at his relationship with them a bit differently. It would be easier to make Will gay if this were a clean slate and I were ignoring his canon relationships with women, but because this is a post fall fic, it is a challenge to do so, but I decided to take that risk and accept the challenge.

Also because I'm crazy and think Hannibal looks at fan theories on reddit every time he sees a movie (like I do), this is what I imagine Hannibal sent Will about Patrick Bateman.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> Lol I don't like this chapter, but hopefully all of you will!
>
> These chapters are taking me so long to write, that I really can't promise a consistent uploading schedule at the moment. I have other ideas that I keep prioritizing over this one, but these chapters do get done eventually (just not on the days I said they would), so make sure you're subscribed to get email notifications when I DO update.

Will is behind the counter at the shop, alone in the building for the morning. He reads through the stack of applications he didn't end up reading the night before, and keeps a list of good candidates for future reference. He'll be sure to ask Remy and Amelie if they know any of the people who applied and either do or do not want them to work there.

Around noon Hannibal walks in through the front door. He turns and looks around, and looks defeated when he spots several customers perusing the shelves.

"Hey," Will calls out to him. "You bring lunch?"

Hannibal nods and holds up the bag in his hand.

"You can go set up in the office if you want," Will offers when Hannibal comes up to the counter. "Amelie will be here in a few minutes, and then I can join you."

Hannibal goes into the back office, and Will stays at the counter, watching the customers finish up their shopping and bring it over to be rung up. He has to answer a few questions about gear, and then someone asks if he repairs motors, and could take a look at their boat. He has to go into the office to get his calendar to write down a date and time, and sees that Hannibal has a full spread of food out on the desk.

He nearly suggests they just bring it home after Amelie shows up for her shift, but he doesn't want to make Hannibal pack it all up again after coming all the way here. That would be rude.

As he grabs his calendar off the desk, he rubs Hannibal's shoulder with his other hand, silently telling him that he'll be right back.

They've gone better at nonverbal communication, speaking with their eyes and light touches. It sometimes feels as if they can read each other's minds. Other times, though, Will knows they're far from understanding each other and living peacefully.

Will feels on edge about the night before, still. The email Hannibal sent him uprooted his entire sense of identity, and he feels like he has nothing to latch onto anymore. Have all of his relationships really been so hollow as Hannibal suggests? He can't help but feel as though every emotion he has ever felt has been someone else's.

Now, on top of having to learn how to live with Hannibal Lecter—when he can't speak, no less—Will also has to learn how to live with himself. He has to learn how to accept another thing about himself.

Will pushes those thoughts aside to finish helping the customers at the counter.

When Amelie shows up for her shift, the first thing Will notices is the scarf tied around her neck. So similar to one Abigail would wear, and it hurts Will terribly. He wonders if Abigail would still cover her scars if she lived through the second cut to her throat.

He greets her, but it comes out strained and weak, and he removes himself from the situation as quickly as he can. He needs to get off the sales floor before he starts crying in front of his employee, or their customers. He can't go into the office, either, though. Not with Hannibal sitting in there. The man who killed the girl he still sees every single day—in front of him, in the form of the young girl who isn't her, and in his nightmares.

He gathers his things and leaves the shop, not bothering to tell Hannibal he isn't joining him for lunch. He doesn't care if Hannibal gets mad about it. He just can't be there.

He gets home, breathing heavily, unable to catch his breath. He fills a glass with water at the kitchen sink, and drinks it down, and then another. He finds a banana on the counter and eats that, knowing he needs to eat something, even if he really doesn't feel hungry anymore.

Hannibal comes in just minutes after him. He stands in the kitchen doorway, arms crossed over his chest, the bag of food hanging from one hand. He looks at Will with a fire in his eyes—anger that Will hasn't seen since their first afternoon here.

Will can't deal with it.

He turns and leaves the kitchen through the other doorway and tries to walk off toward his room.

His arm is grabbed before he can even make it to the stairs, a firm grip holding him tight. It hurts, and it's going to bruise, Will knows. He tries to rip his arm out of Hannibal's hand, and keep moving, but his shoulder burns as Hannibal pulls him back.

Will turns and swings his fist, connecting with Hannibal's jaw.

"Leave me alone," Will warns.

Hannibal rubs his chin with one hand, moving his jaw to make sure everything's okay, and Will just watches. He knows he should take his chance to run while Hannibal is distracted, and he knows staying where he is could be deadly, but he is filled with the overwhelming urge to do more.

“You’ve noticed, haven’t you?” Will asks. “How Amelie is like Abigail? Did you know that when you killed the previous shop owner? Did you know she worked there and that it would kill me to look at her?”

He’s angry and each word comes out with a harsh bite to it. Hannibal just stares at him, completely indifferent. Somehow, that makes Will even more angry than any answer Hannibal could have given.

Will wants to see the pain in Hannibal’s eyes, a quiver of his bottom lip. Anything to prove that Will might be hurting him in even a fraction of the amount Hannibal has hurt him.

Hannibal reaches out to cup Will’s cheek, and opens his mouth as if to speak. Will knows he can’t, but he still growls, “Don’t.”

He backs away from Hannibal, and tries to steady his breathing. It’s almost impossible, and he knows that what he is feeling is all him right now. Hannibal feels completely indifferent toward killing Abigail—maybe even indifferent toward Will’s emotions regarding her. That’s what Will tells himself, at least. Because he knows a lot of his anger is misplaced. He knows he’s angry about last night, how his view of himself is warping and changing, how he’s in love with a goddamn serial killer, and still chooses him after *everything.* He’s mad at himself as much as he is at Hannibal. He knows all this, and yet he pretends all the resentment is brought on by thoughts of Abigail, and not the fact that he was on edge long before Amelie walked into the shop and reminded him of her.

“You don’t get to talk about Abigail, Hannibal. You know why? Because you fucking killed her! And you didn’t have to. You didn’t have to kill her, and maybe if you would have just *ran* with her when I warned you, we would be in a different place than we are now!” Will yells. “Maybe I’d have already fucked you if I didn’t have so many reasons to hate you.”

He pushes at Hannibal’s chest, and watches as the man’s face warps into one of pain and confusion.

“I’ve forgiven you for a lot, but I’ll never forgive you for that, Hannibal. I will never forgive you for killing her,” Will manages to get almost all of the words, but his voice cracks when he says the other man’s name. The rest of it comes out in a high and strained voice as he fights back tears.

Hannibal opens his arms, and Will knows that, even where his words fail, Hannibal still wants to comfort him. He wants to comfort Will in the way Will has comforted him night after night, allowing him into his bed and into his arms.

Will steps forward, but not into the embrace. Hannibal seems to be sure Will is going to surrender to his comfort, but before Will can let himself be wrapped up in those strong arms, he pulls back his fist and lands a punch to Hannibal’s nose.

Will watches smugly as Hannibal’s fingers raise to check for blood, and Will is happy there is. The punch to Hannibal’s jaw wasn’t satisfying enough, with no marks to show for it, but the punch to his now bleeding nose—that makes Will elated. He smirks at his work, and while he is distracted, Hannibal’s fist connects with Will’s stomach, right over the scar given

by the same hand years before. Will didn't expect Hannibal to retaliate, not after he didn't following the first punch, so this one takes him by surprise.

Will groans and stumbles back, and falls against the stairs, landing on his ass on the third from the bottom. He turns as quickly as he can and forces himself up to his feet, bolting for the upstairs landing. Just a few feet from there, and he can lock himself in his room until Hannibal calms down. No one needs to get hurt worse than they have. He trips before he gets to his door, slowing himself down considerably, but he knows Hannibal is walking, rather than running. He moves swiftly, even as he walks, so he catches up to Will without exerting himself. He slams his hand against the door as Will tries to turn and close it, forcing it back open.

He stalks into Will's room, fist clenched at his side. Will knows his options are limited: try to run past Hannibal and out of the house (won't work), try to lock himself in the ensuite (Hannibal probably has a key), or fight back. He lunges at Hannibal, choosing the third option.

The two men land punch after punch, pushing, scratching, anything to inflict pain. At one point Will feels sharp teeth dig into his good shoulder, likely drawing blood, and he responds with a firm knee to Hannibal's gut. Hannibal's teeth release and he headbutts Will in the mouth. Will touches his teeth to make sure they are all still intact, and returns the favor. They went on like that, back and forth, in a physical altercation long overdue.

After years of harboring resentment, they give each other what they feel is deserved. It's cathartic.

Will knows how to fight, but he isn't as big or strong as Hannibal, so when Hannibal finally tackles Will to the ground, he has no choice but to take it.

Will hits the carpet with a grimace on his face, pain shooting up through his tailbone where it collides with the floor. With Will now sprawled out flat on his back, Hannibal with his knees on each side of Will's thighs, the smaller man quickly moves to cover his face with his arms to shield from the inevitable blows he is about to endure. When they never come, Will peeks between his arms to see Hannibal just staring down at him. Will sees a hint of something in Hannibal's eyes and lets himself relax when he realizes it isn't threatening.

Hannibal notices the act of submission and takes his chance to grab Will's wrists and pin them above his head before he can try to resist.

Will struggles, trying to twist his arms out of Hannibal's hands, but the grip on his wrists will not let up. He stops fighting when he realizes there really is no point.

Hannibal looks down at him with a look that he knows is asking, 'Are you done?'

He sighs, and nods, letting his head fall back to the floor of his bedroom. He's exhausted, both of his shoulders hurt now, and he knows he's sporting a black eye and a bloody mouth. Hannibal doesn't look any better than Will imagines he looks himself. The fight has left him. Hopefully, it has left both of them.

Hannibal releases his grip on Will's wrists and sits back on his heels, Will still underneath him. Neither man makes a move, just stays exactly where they are, Will's hands still above his head, Hannibal's own now sitting atop his own head, trying to catch his breath and steady it.

They stay like that, staring at each other for several minutes. Something inside Will changes, and rather than all that hate and confusion he has felt over the last two days (several years), he can only think about how much he loves the man above him. Hannibal could have easily killed him in this fight, could have reached out, and snapped his neck. Could have grabbed a pen off the nightstand and stabbed it into Will's jugular. Could have slammed his head against the bedpost. But he didn't.

Hannibal fought back because Will needed a fight. He did it because Will needed to feel pain and give it back to him. Maybe there are means of influence other than violence, but violence is what they know.

Will finally makes a move to try and sit up. When Hannibal sees that Will is trying to move, he attempts to get up to allow the other man out from under him, but Will wraps his arms around Hannibal's waist and pulls him back down so he's straddling Will's lap, his hands steadying himself on Will's shoulders. Will gasps when he feels Hannibal's hardening cock through their layers of clothing. Hannibal tries to pull back again, and Will feels another wave of love, knowing that Hannibal is trying to remove himself from the situation rather than make Will uncomfortable. Will, though, is aching in his pants, arousal pooling low in his abdomen. The feeling of Hannibal's hard cock against him makes his own twitch.

So maybe he *is* sexually attracted to Hannibal, then.

This is really all Will needs. Leaving one arm still wrapped around Hannibal's waist, Will raises a hand to place on Hannibal's cheek. He pushes himself up, trying to reach Hannibal's lips with his own, but Hannibal pulls his head back again.

Will is finally giving in, and now Hannibal doesn't want him? *What the fuck is this?* Will asks himself. He pushes forward again, trying to kiss Hannibal again, and their lips just barely brush together before Hannibal pulls himself out of Will's grip and stands. He adjusts himself in his pants and leaves the room.

Still sitting on the floor, Will drops his face into his hands and lets out a frustrated groan.

A few minutes later he hears the front door open and slam shut again.

He eventually gets off the floor and goes into the bathroom. He peels his t-shirt off and examines the bite on his shoulder. Hannibal somehow broke skin through the fabric, and Will has to carefully pick bits of cotton out of the wound.

His face and body are littered in bruises, his lip is split, and his arms are covered in scratches, some oozing blood. He looks in the cabinet under the bathroom sink for a first aid kit, but doesn't find one. He knows Hannibal has one in the house somewhere, but he doesn't know where.

The last thing he wants to do is text the man, but he finds himself with no choice.

Will: *Where's the first aid kit? You fucking bit me.*

Hannibal: *Pantry. Top shelf.*

Will: *Thanks.*

Then, because Will needs an answer, he sends another message.

Will: *Why didn't you want to kiss me?*

Hannibal: *I did.*

Hannibal: *I have wanted to since the moment I met you, Will, but I do not want your physical affections if you are angry with me. Nor do I want you to force yourself into it while you are so confused about yourself. I have waited years for you, and I don't want our relationship to continue to be built on pain. I feel as though having physical relations in any way while you are angry with me would be taking advantage of you. Especially when you are confused about yourself and your feelings for me. I fear your emotions were not entirely your own, but an extension of mine. It took great willpower for me to stand up.*

Hannibal: *You weren't entirely in your right mind. I will be honest; neither was I.*

Will: *Oh, because I was in my right mind when you framed me for murder. Because you never took advantage of me when my brain was on fire. (Sarcasm, by the way!) But one kiss is too much because I was angry?*

Will finds himself glad that Hannibal has left the house, forcing them into a texting match. It feels like the most honest conversation they've had in months, both of them on equal playing fields with the medium of conversation.

Hannibal's typing bubble shows up and goes away several times. There's nothing for several minutes, and Will smiles at his obvious victory, knowing he has made Hannibal unable to form a response. The text equivalent of rendering someone speechless.

He takes the moment to go find the first aid kit in the pantry and bring it back to his bathroom.

Long minutes go by where Will's phone lay silent on the bathroom counter. He cleans all of his wounds, and bandages the worst of them. By the time he finishes, his phone lights up with another message from Hannibal.

Hannibal: *My intentions in regards to you have changed since then. I wanted you to become the truest version of you, more so than I cared about your mental and physical wellbeing, I admit. I desired you then, but now, Will, I love you. I am deeply in love with you. There's a great difference, and now I want nothing more than your happiness and safety. For you to associate our first real kiss with violence and pain would hurt me more than any pain I have ever felt. If we were to pursue a sexually intimate relationship, I need you to be sure that's what you want. After our fight, I couldn't be so sure.*

Hannibal: *I need some space, darling. Take care of your wounds, please. I'll come home when I am ready.*

Will slides his phone into his pocket and goes to find another shirt. He ends up pulling on one of Hannibal's sweaters instead, suddenly feeling cold and all alone in their large house. The garment smells like the older man, and Will holds it up to his nose, breathing in the scent. He needs to resolve this, and he needs to do it fast. Living without Hannibal isn't an option. Fighting with Hannibal is not acceptable.

He loves Hannibal, and he wants him close at all times. He wants to share a bed every night, he wants to hold him, and be near him, and maybe even kiss sometimes. He could handle that, for sure. The rest of it might take time, but he can give those things to Hannibal now. As soon as the older man gets home, Will is going to sit him down in the living room, and explain himself.

It's no question whether or not Hannibal will accept him. It's just a matter of whether or not Hannibal believes him.

Unfortunately, Will's plan doesn't quite work out. Instead, he takes a bottle of wine out of the fridge and brings it out onto the veranda. He sits there, drinking straight from the bottle until it's gone, watching the sun set. He hopes Hannibal will come home soon, but he really can't be too sure if he will or not.

Having only eaten a banana since breakfast, the wine hits him way harder than he would have liked for it to. He stands up on unsteady feet and staggers into the house. He disposes of the bottle, holding onto the kitchen counter as he moves toward the fridge. He gets everything he needs to make a sandwich, and then decides against it.

Instead, he pulls out his phone and orders food for delivery. He gathers cash from where Hannibal told him it's hidden, and gives the delivery driver a one hundred percent tip, just because he can. And maybe because he's a bit angry at Hannibal still, and spending his money seems like a good way to get back at him.

He laughs to himself as soon as the driver leaves again, knowing Hannibal won't even notice that the bills are missing from the envelope.

Will takes the food into the living room and eats leaning over the coffee table. He watches the rest of the movie from the night before, and ends up falling asleep on the couch.

When he wakes again, Hannibal is sitting on the couch next to his head, and the food on the coffee table has been cleaned up.

"Hey," Will says, sitting up and turning toward Hannibal.

Hannibal offers him a faint smile, and gestures with his head toward the stairs, the question on his face.

"No, stay here a bit," Will says. Still drunk, and feeling bold, he throws his idea of explaining himself out the window, and crawls over to Hannibal. He throws one leg over Hannibal's

thighs and places a knee on each side of him, straddling him, but not touching yet. Will slurs, "I *really* want to kiss you. Don't worry, I'm not mad anymore, so it's not taking advantage."

Will lowers his hips to rub his groin against Hannibal's, cupping his cheeks and resting their foreheads together as he gasps at the sensation. He feels himself getting hard in his pants, and knows Hannibal has to be right. He never got an erection so quickly with any of the women he's been with.

Hannibal turns his face away from Will, so he can reach over and grab his notepad. He writes a few words and turns it so Will can see. Will has to pull back a bit to properly read it, squinting at the words on the paper.

You're drunk.

"No," Will disagrees, shaking his head. "A bit tipsy, maybe, but not drunk. Don't you want me?"

He rolls his hips again, and feels Hannibal's half-hard cock against his own. He groans in response.

"Please," Will begs. "Kiss me."

Hannibal brings one hand up to cup Will's cheek, but the other goes to his stomach, pushing Will's body away from his own. The firm pressure against his lower abdomen, paired with the hand on his cheek feel all too familiar. Suddenly he's back in Hannibal's kitchen in Baltimore, and the hand on his stomach has a blade in it, slicing him open. A deep, searing pain juxtaposed to the calming hand on his cheek.

Half in Baltimore, and half in France, now, what comes next is exactly the same. Hannibal gathers him into his arms and holds his shaking body tight to his chest.

He feels too much, as if he's truly back in that house, scared for his life, and knowing he may not make it out of that kitchen.

He pulls himself out of Hannibal's arms and collapses onto the couch next to Hannibal, the kitchen in Baltimore still surrounding him.

Will's hands fly to his stomach to try and hold it together, trying to apply pressure to stop the blood as he falls to the floor, but he's not falling, he's not bleeding. He's laying on a couch, years later, wound completely healed, albeit scarred, in their shared home. Hannibal doesn't want to hurt him anymore—not in any lasting way, anyway, seeing as he has a bite mark and a split lip to show that Hannibal *did* harm him. Hannibal doesn't want to hurt him like that anymore, he tells himself. He won't slice Will open and abandon him. He couldn't. Will forces himself to believe it, trying to ground himself and remind himself where he is, and *when.*

Trembling, still, as he comes back to himself, back to their shared house in France, no blood to be seen, no Baltimore kitchen surrounding him, he sees that Hannibal has pulled away

entirely. Now sitting on the other end of the couch, his hands in his own lap, unsure what to do, what kind of touch would be acceptable now.

Will's no longer aroused like he had been just minutes ago. He feels completely sober now too, feeling so stupid for trying to initiate something sexual while he was in such a state. He should have known Hannibal would try pushing him away—he didn't expect a flashback, nor did he expect it to be so intense, but he feels like he should have known.

"I'm okay," Will breathes, fully back to himself. "I'm okay."

Hannibal looks at him from the other side of the large sectional, but he doesn't look convinced at all. He doesn't make a move toward Will, but Will wishes he would. He could really use the hug Hannibal offered earlier that day, but now neither of them know what is acceptable between them.

Will tried pushing a boundary, and Hannibal touched him in a way that sent him back in time, and now it seems that Hannibal is scared, and Will—

Well, Will is entirely embarrassed.

He doesn't quite know what to do, but he can sense that Hannibal wants to comfort him. He really, really wants to be comforted.

"Well, I um," Will starts. He holds out a hand. "Can you come here?"

Hannibal slides carefully across the couch, as if he's scared to spook Will and send him running. As soon as he's close enough, Will grabs him and pulls him closer, falling back against the couch as he goes. He pulls Hannibal down to lay half on top of him, half wedged between the back of the couch.

Settled under the blanket on the couch, Hannibal's head resting on his shoulder, Will picks up the TV remote and turns on a random channel.

"Can we just lay here for a while?" Will asks. Hannibal nods against his shoulder, so Will continues, "I'm sorry for all of today. I'm not proud of myself."

Hannibal shrugs and waves a hand in dismissal. All is forgotten, he says without words.

"Did you kill someone tonight?" Will asks.

Hannibal shakes his head. No.

"Did you want to?"

A nod.

"Why didn't you?" Will asks.

Hannibal places his hand over Will's beating heart, and presses a kiss to his shoulder. That's enough of an answer for Will.

After several minutes, Will thinks Hannibal has fallen asleep, but when he looks down, the other man's eyes are on the TV in front of them. He looks as though he isn't watching it, but *through* it. Lost in thought. Will lifts his hand and runs his fingers through Hannibal's hair, lightly massaging and scratching at his scalp.

Hannibal releases a content sigh and turns his face to bury himself into Will's neck. He inhales deeply, then presses a light kiss to Will's pulse point.

This feels good, Will decides. Now that he's let the moment from before pass, he knows he still isn't ready to go much further. He's content with this, and he can only hope that Hannibal is, too. The soft breathing against his throat, and the hand over his heart suggest that he is.

If Will has learned anything about himself today, it's that he *is* definitely attracted to Hannibal. His body is, at least. His mind, on the other hand, is terrified of a sexual relationship with him. Everything is already so complicated between them, he wonders if it would make things worse to add sex into the mix.

But even if he finds that scary, everything he has said is true. He wants Hannibal to kiss him. He wants Hannibal to want him. And he isn't mad anymore. He's sobered up considerably, even more since his flashback to that night in Baltimore. The alcohol has no effect on his words, when he decides to speak after several more minutes.

"I do want to kiss you, still," Will murmurs.

Hannibal makes a humming noise into his neck, and his fingers close in a fist around Will's shirt. He doesn't make any move to make it possible, so Will just turns his head and kisses Hannibal's hair. Another content sigh from Hannibal, and in only seconds his breathing evens out, and his hand goes slack where his fingers were tangled in his shirt.

Just like that, the day is put behind them. If it's intentional that Hannibal fell asleep at that moment, then Will knows it's because Hannibal doesn't want the kiss to be associated with the events of today. With their fight, with Will being drunk and Hannibal being angry, with the flashback that caused Will to relive the most painful moment of his life—it's best to put the day behind them and look forward to tomorrow.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will wakes up the next morning with a pounding headache. He tells himself he's never drinking again. He knows that's a lie.

Hannibal isn't on the couch with him anymore, but on the coffee table in front of him is a bottle of aspirin and a glass of water. He sits up with a groan and downs three pills and half the glass of water, then stands from the couch.

He climbs the steps to his bedroom and into his connected bathroom to piss and brush his teeth. He checks the time and decides he has time to sleep for a few more hours, as it's barely after five in the morning.

After changing into his pajamas—having fallen asleep on the couch fully dressed—he leaves his room in search of Hannibal. He wants to go right back to sleep, but not knowing where the other man is causes him to worry.

He doesn't find Hannibal in his bedroom, nor in the kitchen. He peeks outside, but he isn't in the pool, either. Will sighs and goes back upstairs, figuring Hannibal isn't home.

Will sends a quick text asking where he is, but doesn't expect a response right away. Whatever Hannibal is doing at half past five in the morning, it's probably not intended for Will to know about.

Knowing he'll have to come back at some point, Will decides to walk right past his own bedroom and into Hannibal's. He climbs into Hannibal's small bed and pulls the blankets over his shoulders.

His phone dings where he set it on the nightstand, so he picks it up and checks the message.

Hannibal: *Went for a run. The market opens at six, and we need groceries, so I will be in town waiting for it to open. I will be back in a few hours.*

As Will sets his phone back on the nightstand, he notices the journal that he's seen floating between the two bedrooms of the house. Perhaps it's a breach of privacy, but Will finds himself needing to know what has been written inside it. He clicks on the lamp beside the bed and opens it up to the first page. What he finds surprises him, though he knows it likely shouldn't. Each page has a date, followed by an entry about Hannibal's dreams.

He knows he should set the book down after reading the first sentence and finding out what it is, but he can't bring himself to do it. Instead, he reads on, feeling as though this is the best way to understand Hannibal, and help him. The first one is written just a few nights after their first in the house.

Most of my adult life, I never had nightmares. Now, I have them every night, so I have decided to keep a log of them. They vary—tonight was the one I've been having most since my escape. I dreamt that I was back in my old cell, and that the last two months with Will have been all in my head. Waking up alone on this small mattress does not help me escape this dream. I fear I may have to sleep in Will's bed nightly if I wish to keep these dreams at bay.

The next is dated the next night.

Even sleeping next to Will, I continue to have these nightmares. It's as though my brain knows when he rolls over and lets go of me, or when he gets up to use the restroom while I'm still sleeping. I dream of us hitting the water after our plummet. In these dreams, just like as it happened, we lose each other in the water. I can't scream for him in these nightmares. I can't bring him back to me by the sound of my voice. He doesn't make it out of the water. Waking up sweating, and no longer touching Will— and especially if he has left the bed completely— makes me think I'm lying alone on that beach without him.

Will reads just a few more entries, but they all seem to be variations of those two dreams. Until the last one. Dated today. Hannibal must have woken up from a nightmare, and quickly scribbled the words down on the page, as it's hard to read. He must have written it, calmed himself down, and then made sure Will would have painkillers and water when he woke up, just before leaving the house to clear his mind even more. Will understands, upon reading it, why Hannibal would have to remove himself from the house, and away from Will.

This may be the worst of them all. This one had me killing Will during our fight yesterday afternoon. A scalpel in my pocket one moment, then slicing his throat the next. I woke up and thought I was going to vomit until I noticed Will was still beside me on the couch, very much alive. It's a wonder I didn't wake him up with my heaving breaths. I know that what we have is very dangerous while I cannot properly talk through my feelings with him. Without my words, the violence tries to take hold of me. I can't allow that to happen. If I killed Will, I would have to kill myself.

Will shuts the book and sets it down with shaking hands. It's hard to know how he feels about all of this. Of course, he knew during their fight that Hannibal could have easily just killed him. He didn't though. And Will knows that dreams are not automatically someone's feelings. Hannibal killing Will in his dreams doesn't mean Hannibal is going to truly do it, and since it terrifies Hannibal so much to dream of it, Will knows it could never happen.

So Will knows he isn't scared of that outcome.

No. He's terrified that Hannibal is struggling in a way he cannot help. Will isn't the therapist here, and all the empathy in the world has never made him good at comforting someone, or knowing what to say. That's why he's scared, he thinks. Because he can't be what he believes Hannibal needs.

In more ways than one.

Will calls Hannibal, even though that's not really something they do anymore, since Hannibal can't talk. The phone picks up, but there's no greeting on the other end. Will starts talking

anyway.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “For yesterday, for everything that happened between three and six years ago, for throwing us off that damn cliff, and for never coming to visit you in prison. And I’m sorry for breaching your privacy just now by reading your journal. I know I should not have done that, but I did, and I get it.”

He hears Hannibal sigh on the other end—slightly annoyed, but not murderous, so that’s a good sign.

“Look, I just,” Will continues. “I haven’t been very fair to you, and I know that. I know you’re trying to make this all work between us, and I throw accusations at you, or I get drunk so I don’t have to deal with my feelings for you, and I’m sorry. And I should hang up and let you finish your shopping, but I just needed… I just needed to say this or else I wouldn’t have been able to do anything until I saw you again, and I have no idea when that’s going to be,” he takes a breath, knowing he’s speaking very fast, and sounds entirely crazy, then continues, “because I know you’re scared of hurting me, but you *shouldn’t* be scared of hurting me, okay? I’m going to hang up now. I love you.”

He hits the end call button as soon as the last word is out of his mouth. He didn’t mean to say that last sentence, but it just came out, and it’s *true,* but he didn’t mean to say it.

A text comes through just a few seconds later, and Will doesn’t want to look at it, suddenly feeling very embarrassed about the whole call. He still takes a peek, his curiosity getting the best of him.

Hannibal: *I love you too, darling.*

Will lets out a sigh of relief and sets his phone down on the nightstand. He pulls the blankets over him again and lets himself fall asleep.

Several days go by where Hannibal and Will carefully move around each other, not quite avoiding, but not seeking each other out, either. They do share Will’s bed most nights, but they never speak about it, nor do they introduce anything more physical than Will holding Hannibal through the night.

He’s hyper aware of every movement from Hannibal throughout each night, he notices each and every change in breathing, or quiet murmurs that come out of his mouth. He talks in his sleep, Will realizes. Mostly the only thing that slips from his lips is Will’s name, and it causes Will’s own heart to race each time.

Hannibal still can’t speak when he’s awake, but hearing his voice in any form is all Will needs to know that everything is worth it.

Each time Will suspects Hannibal is having a nightmare, he gently wakes him, and then pulls him close until he stops trembling. Hannibal clings to him in those moments, uncaring that he’s showing so much vulnerability. So much more than he has ever shown anyone but Will.

One morning, a week after the drunken attempt at kissing Hannibal on the couch, Will wakes up to find Hannibal still in bed with him. Usually he goes downstairs to make breakfast before Will wakes, but this morning he looks at Will with a fond smile on his face.

“Morning,” Will mumbles, rubbing at his eyes. He sits up and groans as he stretches his arms above his head.

Hannibal watches him, bangs falling over his forehead and into his eyes. Will would suggest he get a haircut soon if it weren’t so endearing to see Hannibal this way.

Will reaches down and pushes them out of his face, noting how Hannibal pushes his face into the touch.

“Sleep okay?” Will asks, moving his hand down to cup Hannibal’s cheek.

The older man nods and presses his cheek more firmly into Will’s hand. He turns his face just a small amount and presses a light kiss to Will’s thumb. Warmth spreads throughout Will’s entire body and he has to force himself not to act on the desire he’s feeling.

Will clears his throat, and says, “I might sleep a bit longer.”

Hannibal rests his head back onto the pillow and pulls the blankets back over his shoulders, silently telling Will that he’ll stay in bed a bit longer, as well. Will lays down beside him, but turns to lay on his side, facing away from Hannibal.

He hears the sound of a sigh behind him, and it’s unmistakably resigned. As if Hannibal interprets Will’s hesitation as rejection, but like he has woefully accepted that reality. Except it’s not really the reality.

Will can’t find it inside himself to tell Hannibal that at the moment, though. Instead, he listens to the steady breathing behind him and tries, without success, to sleep a while longer.

He slips out of bed just an hour later and goes downstairs to the kitchen in just his pajamas. He decides to make breakfast for the both of them, pulling out a carton of eggs and a package of sausage.

Hannibal comes down just as he’s putting their breakfast onto plates, and Will hands him one of them. They eat at the kitchen counter side by side, Will not speaking, and Hannibal not writing anything down.

It hits Will that he knows a few phrases in sign language that he could tell Hannibal that he knows. In truth, he wanted to have more words locked down before he unveiled to Hannibal that he has been learning, but it seems like a good time to show him that he’s *trying*.

He says Hannibal’s name quietly to get his attention and when the man turns, a confused look on his face, Will holds up one hand with his pinky and pointer finger up toward the sky, and his thumb outward.

Hannibal’s face softens into understanding. He signs the same thing back to Will. ‘*I love you.’*

“I don’t know very much,” Will admits. “But I was thinking you could help me learn, and then it could be an easier way for you to communicate with me? It might take a while, but we have time.”

Hannibal signs ‘okay’ with a smile on his face. He turns back to his plate and continues to eat his breakfast. Will just keeps watching him. He wants nothing more in that moment than to give in and kiss Hannibal.

“Hey, Hannibal?”

He looks up at Will, turning his head just slightly, and Will grabs his chin to turn him even more. He doesn’t give Hannibal any time to react before he presses a kiss to his lips. It’s soft and chaste, and Will pulls back after less than a second. He turns to finish eating, as if a quick kiss is normal and casual between them.

Will glances at Hannibal out of the corner of his eye to see that his mouth is hanging open in surprise. Will laughs quietly and presses his fingers underneath Hannibal’s chin to push his mouth closed again.

After breakfast, Will heads into the shop to conduct a few interviews for possible employees. At lunchtime, Hannibal shows up with a bag of food and a hesitant look on his face.

Will smiles at him, and waves him over to the counter. Hannibal sets the bag down and steps close to Will, clearly calculating something in his head. Will thinks he knows what it is that Hannibal is thinking so hard about.

He reaches out to grab Hannibal’s tie, tugging him closer. When their lips meet, Hannibal is smiling against Will’s mouth, which causes the younger man to let out a breath of laughter when he briefly pulls away. He goes in for another quick kiss, not lingering because they’re in public, but so desperately wanting to.

“You don’t have to ask for this,” Will whispers into his ear. “It’s okay. I’ve gotten over my fear of kissing you.”

Hannibal kisses Will’s jaw and nuzzles his neck before stepping away. He goes to the front door and locks it since there aren’t any customers in the shop and they prefer eating lunch uninterrupted. When he comes back to the counter, he picks up the bag of food again, and looks at Will expectantly before walking into the office.

After taking a deep breath, Will follows him. Hannibal doesn’t immediately start unpacking the lunch he packed. Instead, he shuts the office door behind Will and wraps an arm around his waist, pulling him so they’re pressed together. Will gasps in surprise at the sudden movement, and reaches out to steady himself by putting his hands on Hannibal’s shoulders.

Lips press against his throat, and he tilts his head back to allow more access for the onslaught of gentle kisses.

“Hannibal,” Will breathes. His hands move down to rest on Hannibal’s hips as he’s moved toward the desk. He finds himself hopping up onto the surface and immediately spreading his

legs for Hannibal to stand between them.

Hannibal's lips move up his throat to his face, and Will turns his head to kiss Hannibal on the lips once more. Now behind closed doors, he allows himself to linger, and take what he wants. Their lips move against each other in a slow, gentle kiss. More exploratory than anything, tongues slipping between each other's parted lips to brush against each other and then retreat again.

It's a point in their relationship Will didn't think he'd ever allow himself to get to, and now that he's stepped through this threshold, he wants *more.*

"Hannibal," he breathes again. He rolls his hips slightly, using the leverage of his thighs wrapped around Hannibal's hips to do so. He feels warmth spreading throughout his stomach and thighs at Hannibal's responding groan.

More kisses, all over his face, and down his throat again. The graze of sharp teeth against his neck causes his cock to twitch in his pants, already on its way to being fully hard as Hannibal lightly rubs their groins together.

"Oh god," Will moans. "I want—fuck, I don't know what I want."

Curious, he reaches down and grips Hannibal's erection through his trousers before he can think better of it. Hard, and *big,* and Will *gasps.* Hannibal smiles against Will's throat and pushes his hips further into Will's hand. Will cannot believe this is happening, that Hannibal is affected by him in this way—that he's similarly affected in return.

"God," Will groans again.

He's so hard already, and he really can't believe it—completely sober this time around, rutting against another man, a *serial killer* no less, and he's harder than he thinks he has ever been in his life, if that's possible.

"This is so fucked up," Will breathes.

Hannibal pulls back, putting a few inches between their bodies, but his hands stay resting on Will's thighs.

"I—" Will swallows. "I have been doing some thinking. A lot of thinking. And I think you're… right about everything. Maybe. I don't know. I think I like women, but not ever in the way I like," he clears his throat this time, and whispers, "You."

He feels his cheeks heat up at the admission and buries his face in Hannibal's neck, pulling the other man close again.

"But it's so… I don't care about holding onto my perceived heterosexuality. It doesn't matter to me. It's just that… It's scary to have my perception of myself change so drastically, and it's scary to be in such unknown territory. And you're… you," Will says. "It's not exactly easy coming to terms with the fact that I would allow my dick to go into a cannibal's mouth. A cannibal that tried to eat me in the past, no less."

Hannibal taps the back of Will's head twice, and Will laughs.

"I know you were going to eat my brain, not my cock, but *still,"* Will insists, smiling into Hannibal's neck. He takes a deep breath. "We should… Stop."

Hannibal automatically steps away, a hurt expression momentarily flashing across his face. Just enough for Will to notice, and immediately feel bad for saying so. He reaches a hand out, and takes Hannibal's wrist, pulling him closer again, but not close enough that they're pressed together.

"For now," Will amends. "Because I have a kid coming in to be interviewed in about twenty minutes," he adds, glancing at the clock on the wall behind Hannibal. He sets a hand on Hannibal's chest, straightens his tie for him, considering he was the one to tug at it in the first place, and smiles. "And I would hate for lunch to go to waste."

Hannibal smiles back at him, and leans forward to press one last kiss to Will's lips before he steps away—this time, no feelings of rejection flashing across his face, but optimism about the future, instead. Will takes a few more deep breaths, trying to calm his body down, and make his erection go away. He can see Hannibal is in a similar state as he unpacks the food he brought them.

They eat lunch together and afterwards, Hannibal stays to watch over the shop while Will conducts an interview. The kid seems like he would be a good hire, and doesn't seem to know who either of them are, which is perfect. Will finds himself in a good mood that afternoon.

He closes the shop early and suggests they go out for ice cream. Hannibal gives him a look that causes Will to laugh and shake his head.

"Don't tell me it's going to spoil our dinner. I don't care, and it won't," Will responds. He moves closer to Hannibal, crowding him against the counter, and places a hand on his chest. He moves his fingers in a circular pattern, and looks up at him from under his lashes. "Please?"

Hannibal huffs out a breath of laughter and leans down to press a kiss to Will's forehead. When he pulls back, he nods, and begins to gather his things.

At the shop, Hannibal points to the flavor he wants, and Will orders for him, and then for himself. Will pays, actually having money of his own now that he's running the shop and no longer has to rely strictly on Hannibal's finances. It's a good feeling, knowing that he's still partially independent from Hannibal, that they, while still entirely intertwined, still have some sense of individuality. Even if it's something as simple as money.

They walk home as they eat their ice cream cones. About halfway there, Will slips his hand into Hannibal's and laces their fingers together, swinging their arms back and forth between them. For those few minutes while they walk back home holding hands and eating ice cream, Will can pretend they're normal. A normal couple, a normal kind of love between them, not on the run from the law because they're both murderers. For those minutes, he's content, but he knows that's not how they're supposed to be. They can do *normal* things and enjoy them,

but they'll never be like the other couples walking in town, or eating dinner through the restaurant windows they pass.

Will's not upset about that.

When they arrive home, Hannibal goes to make dinner, and Will follows him through to the kitchen. He sits on a stool at the counter as he watches Hannibal prepare something light for them both.

He can't believe how quickly he has evolved in this past week. Just a week ago, Will had to run to his room at the barest brush of lips. Now, he's watching Hannibal's hands move with a knife, and can't stop thinking about those hands on his body, touching him and holding him. He can't stop looking at Hannibal's groin and thinking of the feeling of his hardening cock under his palm, and he can't stop looking at his lips, wishing he could kiss them all day long.

Will shakes his head, pushing those thoughts from his mind when Hannibal places a plate down in front of him. He's surprised Hannibal doesn't suggest they move into the dining room—they almost always do for dinner—but he murmurs his thanks and digs in, anyway.

After dinner, they settle on the couch together with the TV playing at low volume. Will sips at his glass of wine as he leans against Hannibal's side, sometimes looking at the tablet in Hannibal's lap, sometimes watching the TV.

There's no news about them, as far as he can see, each time he looks at the headlines Hannibal scrolls through on his news app. Will finally looks away when Hannibal opens his email, giving the man just a bit of privacy, though he knows Hannibal really doesn't care, or else he wouldn't open it with Will right there next to him.

When Hannibal puts the tablet off to the side, Will can't take it anymore. His thoughts from while Hannibal was making dinner have been going through his mind for the entire time they've been sitting on the couch, and he just can't take it anymore.

He turns, pushes Hannibal to lay down, and covers him with his own body, kissing his neck, up to his jaw, to his mouth. Hannibal's hands find Will's waist, and hold him there as they kiss each other. Will feels Hannibal's cock hardening against his hip, and he pulls back for a breath, his voice high and shaky when he speaks.

"I don't think we should go further than this tonight," Will tells him. He clears his throat and nuzzles Hannibal's neck. "Just so… just so you know what to expect from me now, so it doesn't seem like I'm running away if things escalate."

Hannibal nods and rubs his hands up and down Will's back. He presses kisses to Will's head, and Will lifts his face again so he can resume kissing Hannibal.

It's good, and it's more than enough for Will tonight. He feels safe and comfortable knowing that there are no further expectations of him beyond making out on the couch. He needs a bit more time to think, and maybe some time to research, before he and Hannibal have sex. And he knows they have things to work through and figure out, seeing as Hannibal won't be able

to speak during the act. Which means Will will likely need some sign language lessons from Hannibal, so that can be Hannibal's form of communication.

Will laughs against Hannibal's mouth, as the thought of him having to find a piece of paper to tell Will something while they're in the middle of fucking.

Hannibal pulls Will's head up by his hair and looks at him with an eyebrow raised, clearly asking what's so funny.

"Nothing," Will whispers.

Hannibal pinches his side with the hand not holding his head up, and Will yelps in surprise.

"I was just thinking," Will tells him.

Hannibal rolls his eyes, as if to say, 'no shit,' and brings his face up to nip at Will's nose.

"I was just thinking that you'll have to teach me more sign language before we have sex, so I don't have to wait for you to write things you want down on paper," Will finally answers. He presses a kiss to Hannibal's nose, then whispers, "Happy? No more pinching."

Hannibal smiles, and pinches his side again, then rolls them over so he's on top of Will. He places one more kiss to his lips, and then gets off the couch, standing and stretching. He checks his watch, and then shows Will the time. It's later than they usually head up to bed.

"I think I should sleep alone tonight," Will whispers.

Hannibal's face falls, but he nods anyway. He picks up their empty wine glasses and leaves the room with them. Will knows he's upset about the sudden change, and the fact that he has to sleep alone, even when Will knows it hurts him to do so. He knows it feels like rejection and betrayal to Hannibal.

Will immediately gets up and follows him.

"Hannibal, I just have a lot to think through, okay?" Will says softly. "You distract me."

Hannibal, standing at the sink washing dishes, doesn't turn to look at him, so he can't see what his face looks like when he nods again.

"I know it's difficult for you to sleep alone, so I guess if you can't fall asleep or if you wake up, you can come to me," Will offers. "I just would like a bit of alone time if it's possible."

He goes up behind Hannibal and presses himself to his back, wrapping his arms around his waist. Hannibal lets his weight shift so he's resting slightly against Will, and he lets out a sigh.

"I love you," Will whispers into his neck. "I want to be with you, and sleep next to you every night, but today has been a lot. I have to process it all, okay? You can still come to me if you need me, baby."

Hannibal tenses at the term of endearment that Will accidentally allowed to slip out. It's one he has used with past partners, Molly, especially, and he didn't even stop to think that Hannibal might not like it. *Such a common pet name, that Hannibal probably thinks he's above it,* Will thinks. Or maybe it's the possible feelings of infantilization that come with it that most people don't think of. Hannibal would certainly be the type of person to analyze a pet name like that, Will decides. Especially when he's been so vulnerable in the months since the fall. That must be the cause of his reaction.

"Sorry," Will murmurs. "If you don't like that one, I won't call you that."

Hannibal turns around in his arms, shaking his head frantically. He signs something with a questioning look on his face, seeing if Will knows what he's saying, and Will recognizes it as the word 'like.'

"You like it?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods once, and smiles. A blush creeps up on his cheeks and he looks away.

"I just thought because you tensed up that you didn't," Will explains.

The next thing Hannibal signs, Will doesn't recognize, so he shakes his head, and grabs a piece of paper off the counter behind Hannibal.

'I was surprised.' Hannibal writes. He looks like he's contemplating adding more, or not, likely an afterthought now that he has a piece of paper to write it instead of hoping Will's self-instruction covered enough. He adds, *'You've never used an endearment with me before. In fact, I don't think anyone has.'*

"Not even Alana?" Will asks. "She seems like she would. I heard her call Margot 'sweetheart' at my we—"

Will cuts himself off, deciding that he shouldn't bring up his marriage to Molly tonight. Especially not the wedding.

He knows Hannibal noticed, but the other man makes no indication. He just writes down, *'No, not even Alana.'*

Will hums in response.

"I can call you baby," he whispers, leaning forward to speak right into Hannibal's ear, a hand on the older man's chest, feeling his heartbeat. "And I can call you darlin' or sweetheart, too. Whatever you want."

He kisses him hard on the lips, for just a few seconds, then he steps away. He sees Hannibal's eyes are closed and his hands are gripping the counter behind him.

"I'm going up the bed. I'll see you in the morning," Will tells him.

Hannibal just nods. Will turns and goes upstairs to his room, shutting the door, but not locking it, just in case Hannibal does need him during the night.

Truth be told, Will doesn’t end up actually processing anything about the day. Instead, he finds himself thinking about Hannibal’s lips on his own, and their cocks rubbing together through their pants. He ends up at his desk in front of his laptop, earbuds in and scrolling through the top results on a gay porn site. He tells himself it’s strictly research, to see what to expect, but he ends up with his hand in his boxers, pulling out his hardening cock.

He watches bits and pieces of videos, trying to see what kinds of things he likes watching, and what he doesn’t. He watches videos of men getting fucked from behind, videos of men riding another, shower scenes, outdoor scenes. He strokes himself slowly, stopping each time he gets close, and picking another video. He does that a few times until he can’t take it anymore and *needs* to cum. He clicks one more, skipping to some point after the halfway mark, knowing he isn’t going to last much longer at all.

He moves his hand faster, racing to the finish line along with the men in the video. His back arches in his chair, toes curling against the carpeted flooring as he cums all over his hand and up his chest, watching another man cum all over himself as he’s fucked by another.

He closes out of the website immediately after that, not even allowing himself a second to catch his breath before the shame sets in. He doesn’t know why exactly he’s ashamed—he’s obviously in a relationship with another man, afterall, even if they haven’t had sex yet.

Will can hear his dad’s voice in the back of his head, though. Calling him a faggot, and threatening to kick his ass. Even twenty years before Will was aware of his attraction to men, it seems like his dad already knew.

Will always pretended none of that bothered him, of course. He wasn’t gay then, and had never thought of himself as such, so he never thought his dad’s words had gotten to him. They did, though. Will thinks he has always known that. Back then, Will thought he was taking offense to them on behalf of other gay people, but he knows it always felt personal.

Maybe that’s the reason why Will killed him.

Chapter End Notes

Went back and forth for several weeks in my head about whether or not to add that last sentence into this fic or to save that backstory idea for a different one, buuuuut it fit here.

Let me know what you're thinking. Comments keep me motivation to get these chapters out quicker, so please please comment and let me know if you're still reading.

And don't worry, smut next chapter, I promise. I've never written something so slow of a burn before, so I'm glad to finally get this part of their relationship moving.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Short chapter for this week. Let me know what you think!!

The reminder of what happened to his dad hits Will hard, and he finds himself frantically wiping himself clean with a kleenex, and pulling his boxers back over his hips. He leaves his room, speed walking down the hall to Hannibal's room, not caring about anything other than finally confessing something he has been holding a secret for years.

He opens the door without knocking and rushes into the room, finding Hannibal sitting at his desk with a sketchbook in front of him, just the light from the lamp illuminating the room. He's in his pajamas, and his hair is still damp from his shower, and his bed is still made from the last time he slept in it, so Will knows he hasn't even tried to sleep. Hannibal turns his head and looks at Will, sniffing the air, and then wrinkling his nose. He turns back to the sketch in front of him, his back turned to Will. It's neither an invitation in, nor is it a request for Will to leave.

"Can I talk to you?" Will asks.

Hannibal holds up a piece of paper over his shoulder without turning. Will walks forward and takes it from him, moving into the light of the lamp to read it.

'Go shower,' it reads.

Will half groans, half screams in frustration, and stalks off into Hannibal's bathroom instead of arguing. He peels off his boxers and jumps into the shower, quickly washing himself with Hannibal's soap. He shuts off the shower and steps out, wrapping a towel around his hips and leaving the bathroom again, only five minutes after he walked in.

Hannibal sighs, but doesn't hand Will another note, nor does he wrinkle his nose again. Will walks across the room to Hannibal's dresser and pulls out a pair of sleep pants, dropping the towel and stepping into them. He doesn't bother with underwear, not wanting to leave the room to get a pair of his own, and not feeling comfortable taking a pair of Hannibal's.

"Can I talk to you now?" Will asks.

Finally, Hannibal turns around in his chair, and looks at Will.

"I killed my dad," Will admits. "I never told you that."

Hannibal's face doesn't change, but he does sit up a little bit straighter.

“It was ruled an accident, I think I did tell you that,” Will says.

Hannibal signs something, and Will shakes his head.

“Spell it?” Will asks.

Hannibal does. *D-R-O-W-N-E-D.*

“Yeah,” Will says, nodding. He goes over and sits on the edge of Hannibal’s bed, picking at the blanket underneath him. “Yeah, he drowned.”

He pauses for a while, not looking up at Hannibal because he doesn’t know how to go on with the story. When he sees Hannibal’s socked feet on the carpet in front of him, the older man having walked silently across the floor, he still doesn’t look up.

Hannibal sits down beside him, and places a hand on his back. Will leans back into the pressure of the hand, and reminds himself that if anyone is going to understand him, it’s going to be Hannibal.

“I pushed him,” Will admits for the first time in his life. “He was drunk, muttering some shit and I had heard enough, so I pushed him off the dock, watched him hit his head on one of the posts, and walked home to the trailer we were living in. The police came by the next morning, and said he drowned. I already knew.”

Will takes a deep breath, and arranges his body so he can lay on his side with his head in Hannibal’s lap.

“That’s how I knew you had killed the previous owner of the shop, you know,” Will says. “I had seen it before. Because I’ve done it, too. And I think—I think all the bigoted things my dad was saying struck a chord in a more personal way than I had thought at the time. Before I walked away, I asked myself whether or not my life would be better with my dad out of it, and it took no thinking for me to find the answer.”

Hannibal scratches at Will’s scalp, running his fingers through the curls that Will didn’t allow to get wet in the shower. He sighs, content to let Hannibal touch him as he pleases.

Will ends up falling asleep like that, and only wakes when Hannibal moves him to lay with his head on the pillow. He hears the lamp click off, and then feels Hannibal settle beside him, an arm over his waist, and the blanket pulled up to their shoulders.

No judgement from Hannibal tonight, no questions that Will wouldn’t be able to answer, no talking about his true nature, or how his becoming began long before Hannibal came into the picture. For all of that, Will is entirely grateful, and completely in love.

The morning light filters through the blinds when he wakes up. It illuminates Hannibal’s sleeping form, bare but the underwear he has on. He must have gotten too hot in the night, pressed against Will in the small bed, and taken off the rest of his clothes. Will turns so he can press his front to Hannibal’s back, and hold him around the waist.

Curious, he allows his hand to trail down Hannibal's bare stomach and to the waistband of his underwear. He cranes his neck to look, and sees the outline of Hannibal's hard cock against the fabric. His fingers trail lower, brushing against it lightly, then pulling away, back to Hannibal's hip, caressing his hip bone with a light finger, and back up his stomach to the hair on his chest.

Hannibal stirs, but Will doesn't stop his light exploration. Will's own cock stirs in the thin sleep pants he's wearing, pressed against Hannibal's ass.

"Mornin," Will whispers, kissing the back of Hannibal's neck. His hand trails down Hannibal's chest again, and over his stomach, back to the waistband of Hannibal's briefs.

Hannibal looks down, and grabs Will's wrist before it can go any further. He brings the hand to his lips and kisses Will's knuckles before he sits up and begins to move away from the bed. Will knows he's trying to remove himself so he doesn't make Will uncomfortable, but Will reaches out and grabs his wrist before he can get up.

"I—" Will starts. He clears his throat. "Hannibal. Come here."

Will tugs him back onto the bed and over top of him. Hannibal holds himself up so they aren't touching at all, and Will frowns. He brings his hands up to cup Hannibal's cheeks and sits up a bit so he can kiss his lips.

"I think we should, um," Will whispers, looking down between their bodies to their groins. "We should fix that. Somehow."

Hannibal looks concerned and unsure, and Will knows why.

"I want to try," Will says. "I do. I want you, and I want to be with you in this way, and it's inevitable, isn't it? We've always been heading in this direction."

Hannibal nods, and lowers himself as Will spreads his legs, allowing Hannibal to settle in between them.

One of Hannibal's hands moves down between their bodies to palm Will's cock through the pajama pants. Hannibal's other hand is planted on the pillow next to Will's head, holding himself up. Will turns his face so he can kiss Hannibal's wrist, right on the scar left by Matthew Brown all those years ago.

Hannibal moves his hand along Will's cock, and Will arches his back and presses up, gasping as the pressure increases. Hannibal kisses him, swallowing down his moans and gasps, and Will needs more. He needs Hannibal's hands on his bare skin, he needs Hannibal's body pressed against his own, he needs—

"Fuck me," Will pleads when Hannibal pulls back for a breath. "Oh god I want you to fuck me."

He says it again, maybe twice more, babbling on because he's so overwhelmed with emotion right now. The need to have Hannibal as close as possible— *inside* him—is too much. He

loves him, more than he has loved anyone or anything in his life, and it's so absolutely fucked up, but it's the truth.

Hands find his face, and thumbs rub over his cheek bones, a calming gesture, which causes him to slow down, take a breath, and open his eyes. He needs to reset himself before they can move forward, he knows that, but it's so difficult to do so when the promise of more is right in front of him.

Hannibal shakes his head and kisses him again. He pulls back and sits up between Will's legs, and signs something.

"Not yet?" Will asks for confirmation.

A nod, and then Will's pants and being tugged over his hips and off his legs, baring him completely to Hannibal. The pants are tossed to the side, and Hannibal moves back over Will, kisses his lips once, then moves down his body, kissing and nipping at all the skin he finds on his way down. He kisses down, down, down, then across the scar on Will's stomach, just as he had done the night Will confessed his love for him and Hannibal went to his knees.

He spends a lot of time kissing the scar, his hands on Will's waist, holding him in place as he squirms. Will's breathing comes out ragged, a combination of nerves and lust and love and memories making it so, so hard for him to breathe properly.

When Hannibal finally moves away from the scar, Will's chest is heaving, and his eyes are screwed shut, trying to fight off the memories of the night it was given to him. He won't let himself go back to that night again, not now, not when things are finally right between them.

He opens his eyes when Hannibal's hands leave his body, and they don't return for several seconds.

Hannibal is looking down at Will's naked form as if it's the most beautiful thing he has ever seen. His eyes move up his body, to his eyes, and when Hannibal sees he's been caught, he smiles and leans forward for another kiss.

He pulls back again and moves back down Will's body. He presses one last kiss to the scar on his stomach, and then moves even further down.

Will watches in anticipation as Hannibal looks at his cock. When Hannibal licks a stripe up the length, Will moans and spreads his legs even more. Hannibal takes him in hand and licks the head a few times, presses kisses along the shaft, then takes him all the way into his mouth. Will cries out at the suddenness of it, one hand flying to Hannibal's head to tangle his fingers in his hair.

Hannibal looks up at him, and he's so gorgeous, Will can't look away. He knows that his dick is in the mouth of a notorious cannibal, and that his life could change without warning should Hannibal get angry, but he doesn't care about any of that.

He just cares about Hannibal, and how good he feels, and how he wants so much more between them.

Will's hips buck involuntarily, choking Hannibal in the process, and causing him to pull off halfway. Will murmurs an apology, but it turns into another moan when Hannibal takes him down to the root again. He holds Will's hips down as he bobs his head.

It isn't long before Will is close, and he tries pulling Hannibal off, but the older man doesn't relent.

"I'm so close," Will tells him. He's gasping for air and trying to fight off his orgasm. "I don't want this to be over yet. I want you to fuck me."

Hannibal doesn't stop.

"Please, fuck me. Oh my god. Hannibal. Please—I'm gonna—"

Will comes in his mouth.

Hannibal continues to suck his cock, only stopping when Will goes soft, and he's crying out from oversensitivity.

"That's not—" Will starts.

He's cut off when Hannibal kisses him hard, the taste of Will's cum on his tongue.

"I wanted you—" Will tries again when Hannibal pulls back for air.

Hannibal presses a finger to Will's lips, effectively silencing him.

He reaches over to the nightstand, and grabs his journal, flips to a new page and rests it on Will's stomach as he writes something down.

I don't have lubricant, nor do I think you're ready for anal sex, regardless. We have all the time in the world to explore this side of our relationship. Let us not rush things. For both of us, please. It's been a long time since I've had any sexual contact. I fear I won't last more than two seconds. That would be unfortunate and embarrassing.

Will laughs at the last couple of lines when Hannibal hands him the book to read.

"Okay," Will agrees. In truth he knows he's not ready for it, either. He hands the journal back to Hannibal. "Okay, but let me… Can I jerk you off?"

Hannibal shakes his head, and writes something else down.

That's not necessary, darling. I don't require reciprocation. Your trust in me was enough satisfaction.

Hannibal moves up the bed and lays beside Will, his cock still hard in his underwear.

"Please? I want to," Will says. He kisses Hannibal again, then turns on his side and begins to palm Hannibal through his underwear.

Hannibal closes his eyes, and nods.

“Yeah?” Will asks.

He nods again, so Will tugs Hannibal’s underwear down and leaves them around his thighs. He presses the front of his body firmly against the side of Hannibal’s, and throws one leg over the other man’s thighs, trying to get as close as he can to the other man. Hannibal’s eyes snap shut when Will finally wraps a hand around his cock.

Touching Hannibal isn’t so much different than touching himself, Will notices. The same mechanics, just attached to another body.

Through it all, Hannibal makes broken sounds, not quite moans, not quite just breaths. Will could sob hearing just the faintest bit of vocalization from Hannibal. It’s not words, but it doesn’t matter.

He kisses Hannibal over and over while he strokes the other man’s cock.

Hannibal grabs at Will’s knee resting over his legs and squeezes it tight in warning before he arches his back and comes. His mouth hangs open, but no sounds come out, just quick breaths. He trembles as Will strokes him through it, the younger man whispering professions of love into his ear.

After several long seconds, Hannibal stops shaking and relaxes entirely, back into the mattress. Will considers wiping his hand on the sheets, but decides against it.

With one last kiss to Hannibal’s temple, he whispers, “I’m going to take a shower in my room. I’ll make breakfast for us, okay? Come down when you’re ready.”

Hannibal gives him a nod, a sleepy smile on his face. Will wonders if Hannibal’s even going to get out of bed to clean himself up.

In the shower, Will knows he should be thinking about the encounter and evaluating it, but he finds himself simply not doing it. It is what it is. It was inevitable they’d end up where they have, and Will is comfortable with what transpired this morning.

He *is* glad Hannibal decided they aren’t ready for anal sex, though. In the moment, Will was perfectly content to let Hannibal do whatever he wanted, even if that included a dick up his ass. Now, though, the idea of *that* scares him once again. He has a clear mind, unclouded by the need for closeness, unclouded by his own arousal or Hannibal’s, and *now* he knows he needs more time.

Hannibal has a way of reading him about things he won’t stop to think about for himself. Thank god for it, too.

He shuts off the water and dries off. He doesn't hear Hannibal’s own shower running, and he has a strong feeling Hannibal just went back to sleep the second Will left the room.

He wraps his own towel around his waist and heads down the hall. He tells himself he’s just going to check in on him, make sure he’s awake, get dressed himself, and then go downstairs

to make breakfast. Will has to open the shop in an hour today.

He tells himself all of that, but when he finds Hannibal in the exact same spot he left him—pants around his thighs, cock soft, covered in his own release—he disregards all of his plans for the day. The man sleeps with a faint smile on his face, and doesn't stir when Will sits on the edge of the bed. Will leans down to press a kiss to his forehead, and earns a quiet, content sigh. Hannibal shifts suddenly, eyes flying open just as one of Will's wrists is grabbed by a firm hand. Their eyes meet, then the hand falls away as Hannibal descends back into a peaceful sleep.

After he wipes Hannibal's body down with his own towel, and pulls Hannibal's pants the rest of the way off his legs, he sends a quick text to Amelie. Just to let her know she'll have to open the shop when she gets in today, and if anyone has a problem with the adjusted hours for the morning, he'll be in the next day at the regular time.

Once that's squared away, he crawls into bed beside Hannibal and cuddles close to him.

This is good, Will decides. Beyond good.

The next few days, they stay close as often as possible, and always go to the shop together. They go out to eat for lunch each day and Will tells Hannibal all about the motor he's repairing, and Hannibal smiles and squeezes his hand even though Will knows he isn't interested.

At night they crawl into Will's bed, and they kiss each other until they fall asleep. One of the nights, Hannibal uses his mouth on Will again, bringing him to the edge several times until Will is begging to come. Hannibal smirks, and then Will threatens to kill him if he doesn't *do something*.

Hannibal seems to take it seriously because he goes back down, allowing Will to come down his throat.

"Let me," Will says, trying to catch his breath. "You."

Hannibal comes up and kisses him, but shakes his head.

"Aren't you—"

Hannibal kisses him again, cutting him off, and crawls off the bed. Will looks over to see where the fuck he's going, and immediately sees a wet spot on Hannibal's pants. Hannibal removes them, along with his underwear. He looks a bit sheepish as he offers Will a smile, and goes off to the bathroom, seemingly embarrassed for coming in his pants. Not that Will thinks he should be embarrassed about that.

Will's asleep before Hannibal comes back from his shower.

In the morning, Will wakes to sounds coming from downstairs. Quiet words exchanged, and… the sound of a dog's nails clicking on the wood floor? He assumes he's dreaming, and

rolls over. There's no way he could be hearing Hannibal's voice, or a dog downstairs, if he were awake.

It's only minutes later that their bedroom door opens, and…

A dog jumps into bed with Will. The animal is beyond excited, sniffing, and whining, and pawing at Will like it knows him.

Will's eyes fly open.

"Winston?!" Will yells. He lets out a gleeful laugh, and sits up, allowing the dog to flop into his lap and roll around.

Will turns his head and sees Hannibal smiling from the bedroom doorway.

He squeezes Winston a bit tighter.

"Come here," Will says to Hannibal, holding a hand out.

Hannibal comes to him, and Will drags him down for a kiss by his tie.

"I love you," Will tells him when he pulls back. "How?"

Hannibal looks back toward the doorway, and Will spots Chiyoh standing there.

"He's very well behaved," Chiyoh says.

"I— Yeah. Thank you," Will says. "How did you...?"

"I hand delivered your letter, and took Winston," Chiyoh shrugs.

"Molly— is she—"

"She's perfectly fine," Chiyoh promises. "She was very accommodating."

"I thought you were going to Lithuania?"

"I did," Chiyoh answers. "I flew to America from there. I should be off."

Hannibal signs something quickly to her, and she nods, then leaves.

Will is beyond happy, finally having Winston back after months. He thought he would have to wait until they went back to the States for Bedelia, but he's glad it didn't take that long. He wishes he could have all of his dogs, but this is just fine.

Hannibal gets back into bed with him, and laughs silently as Winston crawls across the bed to sniff at him then lick his face. Will moves over and kisses Hannibal's temple, unable to stop himself from smiling. He doesn't want to stop smiling. So yeah, this is just fine.

This is perfect.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> I think I'll definitely be adjusting the chapter count for this fic because I began rearranging things in my initial outline to make the story fit better and I know I probably can't finish it in only 4 more chapters, but for now I'll just keep it at 13 until I can re-evaluate that.
>
> Sorry this took a while! I've been busy. I always say I'll get back on regular posting schedule but I usually break that promise so I won't promise it but I will say that I am going to at least try. We'll see how that goes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Having Winston back makes Will busier than normal. He has to get the dog acclimated to a new home, and spend lost time with him. He doesn't mind, though, because Hannibal is always nearby. He'll walk through the living room while Will is brushing Winston's fur, and place a kiss on the top of Will's head as he passes by. He'll swim laps in the pool while Will throws a ball for Winston in their yard. He sits on a stool in the kitchen while Will makes dog food from scratch.

He feels a lot better having a dog in the house. The months without him were the first time in years Will didn't have a dog, and it made the house feel empty in a way Will didn't even realize until it was filled again.

Unfortunately, with Winston insisting on sleeping in bed with them, Will hasn't had any time to further explore his and Hannibal's evolving relationship. Winston stays wedged between them all night, and Will has to get up as soon as he wakes in the morning to feed him and let him out. He would go back to bed with Hannibal, but he knows Winston would want to come right back up.

"I know, I know," Will says a week after Chiyoh brought the dog to them. "I'll go buy him a bed in the morning. He's like a toddler."

They're laying in bed together, Winston nosing at Hannibal's face. Will would put him in the hallway, but the poor dog has developed separation anxiety without Will the last few months, and whines until the door is opened again. They found that out the first night.

Hannibal smiles and pets the dog's head, then reaches across him to cup Will's cheek.

"I think if he had a buddy he'd leave us alone," Will says.

Hannibal gives him a skeptical look and Will laughs.

“I promise it’s for him, and not for me,” he says. “Yes, I know. I used to have seven dogs, but we can max out at two, okay? I just hate the thought of him being lonely.”

Will climbs over Winston and lays on top of Hannibal.

“Okay?” Will asks, burying his face in Hannibal’s neck. When Hannibal doesn’t nod, Will lifts his head and looks at him. “Please?”

A smile breaks across Hannibal’s face and he nods.

“Yeah?” Will asks.

Hannibal nods again.

Will kisses him softly, then rolls over to fit himself between Hannibal and Winston. Winston huffs in annoyance, and then moves over himself to give Will more room.

Just as long as Will keeps a hand tangled in the dog’s fur all night, Winston doesn’t attempt to get in between their bodies again. That allows Hannibal to turn and press himself against Will’s back, an arm around his waist. It’s the first time in a week they’ve been able to sleep in each other’s arms, and Will has missed the feeling.

Hannibal isn’t in bed with him when he wakes up in the morning, which is common, but something Will hates anyway. He wants to wake up with Hannibal every morning, to see him slowly wake up and smile lazily at him. He wants soft morning kisses, and to tangle his fingers in Hannibal’s soft hair, or soft sweaters. Usually, by the time he makes it downstairs, Hannibal is fully awake and in a suit, with his hair styled perfectly in a way Will feels guilty about messing up.

This morning, Winston isn’t in bed with him either. He can hear a woman’s voice—he assumes it belongs to Chiyoh, though he doesn’t know why she would be here—downstairs, and Winston’s nails hitting the hardwood floor. Will recognizes it as the sound of his paws hitting the floor again after he jumps to catch a treat in his mouth.

Will rolls out of bed, pulls on Hannibal’s robe over his boxers, and goes down the stairs to tell Hannibal off for feeding Winston so many treats so early in the morning.

He stops short of the kitchen door when he hears something he didn’t think he would hear ever again.

“You seem to be speaking just fine,” Chiyoh says. “Why not around him?”

“Each time I think about opening my mouth, it feels as though the words are caught in my throat,” Hannibal says. His voice is rough from disuse, and he trips over a few words as if they’re foreign to him, but it’s still his voice.

Will’s heart thuds in his chest, and his body goes completely cold. He rests against the wall in the hallway outside the kitchen, not trusting his body to fully support him.

“I look at him, and all I can think about is how he felt the only way to be with me was for both of us to be dead,” Hannibal says quietly. “How could I speak to him knowing that? I’m unsure if what I feel now is guilt, but what I do know is that I have done enough damage, and now he’s here with me when he never wanted to be. So yes, I have the ability to speak. Not to him, though. It seems to be selective.”

Will realizes that the morning Winston jumped into bed with him, he *did* hear Hannibal’s voice downstairs.

“He may have tried to kill you both, but he loves you,” Chiyoh says. “Surely you can see that.”

“I fear he only loves me because I’m his last option. He can’t let go of the past,” Hannibal says. “It’s only a matter of time before he realizes he can leave me. He is making his own money at the shop now, after all. He won’t need me.”

“Have you expressed any of these concerns?”

“It would break his heart for me to suggest it,” Hannibal says. “I fear it would push him away even faster. My influence on him has often come back to me in unfortunate ways.”

Will can’t bear to hear any more. He turns around and goes back up the stairs on silent feet, deciding to keep this knowledge to himself. How could he possibly bring any of that up to Hannibal? He feels so much pain throughout his entire body, now knowing that Hannibal can’t speak to him because of what he has done.

He tried to kill them, and Hannibal thinks Will doesn’t truly love him because of it. And Hannibal feels so much guilt over everything—after never feeling guilt once in his life—that he can’t even speak around Will.

Will crawls back into their bed, and pulls the covers over his face, trying to stop the sobbing, but failing miserably.

He doesn’t think he has ever felt worse.

Over an hour later, Winston warns Will of Hannibal coming up the stairs, the dog bounding into the room and then standing at the doorway to wait for the other man. Will gets out of bed and goes over to the bathroom, locks himself in, then hops into the shower.

He can’t let Hannibal know he was crying because then Hannibal would surely know why.

When he finally emerges, Hannibal is laying in their bed with a note already written in his hand. He gives it to Will, who takes it and tries not to cry as he remembers this morning.

We can go to the dog shelter today, if you’d like.

Will nods, and hands the paper back.

“Let me get dressed,” Will says.

Hannibal reaches out a hand and tugs on one of Will's, pulling him to the bed. He reaches out and pulls Will's towel off and lets it fall to the floor. Will laughs as he's pulled into Hannibal's lap.

Will looks over and sees Winston is preoccupied in the hallway with a chew toy, and he knows that this is really the first chance he and Hannibal have had in a week without worrying about the dog, but…

"Not right now," Will says. He kisses Hannibal softly on the lips and gets out of his lap.

Hannibal looks mildly disappointed, but accepts nonetheless. He goes downstairs to make breakfast while Will gets dressed.

Knowing what he knows about Hannibal, he doesn't know how their relationship is going to move forward. For months all he wanted was to hear Hannibal speak again, and now that he has, he feels broken. Because Hannibal can't form words around him, and said things he didn't want to hear.

Will knows that he shouldn't feel bad for himself over this, but he really can't help it.

Downstairs, he pretends nothing is wrong. He kisses Hannibal every chance he gets, and he steals bites of food off his plate. They hold hands as they walk into town, Winston on a leash in front of them. They want to pick a dog that gets along with Winston, so they have brought him along.

There's a pair of puppies clearly from the same litter that Will instantly falls in love with. He hasn't had a puppy since he got Buster, and he would love to have one now. The only problem is that when he looks at these two curled up around each other, he knows he can't separate them.

He looks at Hannibal, who just nods.

That's how they end up with two puppies, about three months old, mixes of god knows what. Will thinks there might be some retriever in them, or perhaps some mastiff, or boxer. He just knows they're very young, but already quite big.

"We need to name them," Will says as they fill out paperwork. "And you should probably walk home and get the car. It'll be easier to take all three of them home in the car."

Hannibal nods. He takes the pen from Will and a small notepad out of his pocket.

You name them.

"Sure," Will agrees.

Hannibal leaves a moment later to start walking home. Will sits there, conversing with the woman behind the desk about all of their needs, and what shots are up to date, and what still needs to be taken care of.

He takes a minute to come up with the names. The first ones that pop up, he shakes out of his head because they're too dumb, but then they won't leave him alone as he tries to think of others. Monster and Ripper, he decides on. He just hopes that Jack doesn't look at pet registrations.

Which reminds him that he'll need to see about getting Winston's microchip information changed, or removed altogether, in case he gets lost and the chip gets scanned by a veterinarian. It would not look good if a dog registered to Will Graham showed up in their area. Unless…

"Is it required for a dog to be microchipped if they're traveling into France?" Will asks the woman.

"Yes, actually," she says. "The dog has to be identified upon arrival."

Well, then he's going to have to talk to Chiyoh about that. He'll call her when he gets home.

Hannibal comes back after a short while, and helps Will load all of the dogs into the car.

When they get home, Will gives Hannibal some instructions, and then leaves to go get some more supplies. On the drive, he calls Chiyoh, and she confirms that Winston's information was changed before leaving the United States. Apparently it was done in such a way that can't be traced to them, which leaves him with one less thing to think about.

He gets what he needs for the new additions to their family, and by the time he gets home, he has nearly forgotten about the morning. It's something he can put aside for now, he decides. If Hannibal isn't ready to talk to him, then he can't force him into it. If he *can't* talk to him, then Will can't force him into it. He'll just show Hannibal all the love he can and make sure the man knows that Will doesn't want them both dead any more.

He has never wanted to be alive more than he does now.

At home, Hannibal is out in the yard with the dogs, but on the kitchen table is a folder with Will's name on it. He opens it, and sees that it's a file on a man that lives a few hours north of them. Everything someone could possibly need to know about another person. Including the fact that he has been arrested several times for picking "fights" in bars. Will doesn't think that's so bad until he sees that the "fights" are actually him harassing queer people.

Will opens the sliding door and Hannibal looks up from his book.

He holds up the folder, and waves it at Hannibal.

"What's this?" Will asks. He knows already.

It's just nice to get the confirmation in the form of Hannibal signing the word 'kill.'

Will smiles.

He looks at the dogs in the yard, none of them bothered with what either of them are doing, and he grabs Hannibal's hand and leads him inside. He picks up one of the bags of things he

bought off the counter and leads Hannibal into the living room.

“I bought lube and condoms,” Will says. He drops the bag onto the coffee table and kisses Hannibal. “Can we—Maybe I could…”

Hannibal cuts him off with another kiss, and nods. He pulls Will down onto the couch with him. Will tries to ignore his nerves as they lay on their sides kissing each other. This is nothing more than they’ve already done, so he doesn’t need to be nervous yet. One step at a time, he tells himself.

Even when Hannibal unzips Will’s pants and reaches inside to wrap a hand around his cock, Will reminds himself that this is all familiar.

“Love you,” Will murmurs into Hannibal’s neck. He begins unbuttoning Hannibal’s shirt, and then unzips his pants. He pushes at the garments until Hannibal rolls off the couch to remove them all. Will pulls his own shirt over his head and shimmies out of his jeans before Hannibal lays down again.

They lay on their sides facing each other again, and Hannibal wraps a hand around both of their erections, pulling gasps out of Will as they rock against each other. Upon Will telling him he’s getting close, Hannibal lets go and rolls onto his back. He gets Will between his legs and hands him the bottle of lube Will bought.

They both end up gasping when Will pushes one slick finger into Hannibal. Will leans down to kiss Hannibal as he moves the finger in and out slowly. A quiet moan leaves Hannibal’s throat, and Will smiles into the kiss.

Hannibal taps Will on the shoulder to get his attention and then holds up two fingers.

“Another?” Will asks.

On Hannibal’s nod, Will pushes in a second finger. Will has done his research, thankfully, and with minimal searching, he’s able to find Hannibal’s prostate. He rubs at that spot inside him, and watches as the other man arches his back and throws his head back, mouth open, although no sounds come out.

“Good?” Will asks.

Hannibal takes a deep breath, and nods. He pulls Will down for another kiss, and another, and another.

He eventually lets Will pull away for air, and holds up three fingers. He mouths the word ‘slow,’ and Will nods in understanding. He does as he’s directed, and when Hannibal indicates that he’s ready, Will pulls his fingers out.

With shaking hands, he tears open a condom and rolls it onto his aching cock. He doesn’t think he has ever been so hard in his life, and it’s all for Hannibal.

He groans and falls forward to kiss Hannibal as he pushes inside. Hannibal is still so tight around him even after all his preparation, and he inches in so slowly because he’s scared of

hurting the man below him. When he pulls back from the kiss, Hannibal looks at him with tears in his eyes, but not from pain.

“I know,” Will breathes. “Me too.”

Hannibal never thought this would ever happen and now his eyes brim with tears because of relief and joy, and Will *knows*. He feels similarly.

Admittedly, he doesn’t last long with Hannibal’s tight body squeezing around him. When his climax hits, he cries out and falls forward again, panting into Hannibal’s neck as he carefully pulls out.

Hannibal gives him the time he needs, allowing Will to come back from where he ascended to, and Will’s grateful for that. After he finally takes one last deep breath, he moves down Hannibal’s body and licks a stripe up his cock.

He’s never done this before, and he tells Hannibal as much, and Hannibal just smiles at him in a way that says ‘obviously,’ and Will smiles back, slightly embarrassed.

It doesn’t seem that his lack of experience is a problem. Hannibal’s fingers are clenched tight in his hair and he involuntarily jerks his hips, writhing under Will’s ministrations. Several quiet moans tear out of Hannibal’s throat and it makes Will want this to last forever.

When Hannibal finally cums, he pulls Will’s head up just in time, wrapping his own hand around himself to give himself a couple quick strokes. Will ends up with cum on his face and likely in his hair, too, having not gotten out of the way quick enough.

Hannibal lays boneless on the couch, breathing heavily and staring at the ceiling. Will immediately feels the need to go wash his face and maybe even take a shower.

After a few awkward moments where he just sits there—cum drying on his face, the condom held in one hand, in need of a trash can—he awkwardly gets up and shuffles out of the room. He sees Hannibal sit up out of the corner of his eye, then fall back down onto the couch again.

Will quickly heads upstairs to his room. He shuts the bedroom door and locks it, then heads into the bathroom to do as he needs.

He needs some time alone.

It’s not that he regrets having sex with Hannibal—it was great. In fact, it was likely the best sex he’s ever had. No need to imagine someone else or close his eyes and only think about the sensations in order to stay hard. His attention was fully on Hannibal, and he had no problems with arousal or desire. That’s not why he shakes as he gets into the shower and turns the water as hot as it can go.

He doesn’t quite know what his problem is. Except maybe he does.

He knows it shouldn’t matter, but he does feel like he has betrayed everyone in his past life with each progression of him and Hannibal’s sex life. With each moment they experience

different types of intimacy, sexual and nonsexual alike.

He's chosen Hannibal, and generally he doesn't have second thoughts about that, but today he can't help but think of the life he left behind.

With Winston as a reminder, as well. With Monster and Ripper, now too. A reminder that he can easily replace everyone he used to think he loved. Whether it's his old dogs with the new ones, or his family back in America with Hannibal.

Except that's not quite right.

Because Hannibal was his long before Molly and Walter came along.

So why do I feel like the worst person on the planet? Will asks himself. Surely, Molly knew their relationship wasn't built to last. Surely, Molly knew that Hannibal had Will's heart first. Surely, Will shouldn't *feel* like he's betrayed her because of all of this because he *knows* that he hasn't. He was never hers.

He wishes he could talk this out with Hannibal and have the man's soothing voice bring him to reason. He wishes he could talk to him and be spoken to back.

He can't, though.

Tears begin to fall as he showers.

He wishes he could go back to the very first day they met and change everything—so that neither one of them had to get hurt, and so Abigail didn't have to die, and so they could have a life without fear of the law or without the reminder of old pain.

He wishes he could go back to the day that Hannibal found him in his classroom, staring off into the distance, and had brought him back to reality. That night was the night the organ harvester was caught and Hannibal rolled up his sleeves to save a life. He wishes he would have understood what he was feeling that day when he looked at Hannibal's bare forearms and his gloved hands covered in blood. Maybe if he knew that what he was feeling was attraction, then he could have stayed for the dinner party just days later. Maybe he would have stayed after, too. Things could've been so much easier if they became lovers earlier on.

And if not that day, then the day he told Matthew Brown to kill Hannibal. He could go back and change that and *maybe,* just *maybe,* things could have gone differently. Or back to the day he decided to work with Jack to lure Hannibal, or back to the day Hannibal held his face in the barn (Will could have just leaned in and kissed him and admitted to the entire plan and Hannibal would have forgiven him), or to the night Hannibal told them they could run away and leave everything behind. He just wishes something along the way would've made it different right now.

Or to the day he sent Hannibal away, the day he turned himself in. He wishes he could go back to that day and choose Hannibal then. Even after everything that happened that week and in the months and year before.

Or they could keep all their history, and he could go back to the day they killed Dolarhyde and not throw them from that cliff.

Anything to make it better. Anything to have Hannibal help him process everything.

He feels bad for himself, but he feels terrible for doing that to Hannibal, too. For driving him to the point where he can speak with others, but not to him. Not feeling comfortable, but also feeling physically unable because of his own guilt over the reasons that drove Will into attempting murder-suicide.

Will feels guilty for what he did. Even if it felt like the only way, then, he knows now that they can easily live with each other. Even with the obstacles they now face, they get by. He wishes he would have known that on the day he decided he couldn't live with or without the man.

It tears him apart knowing that everything could have been different if he just made different decisions.

And now Hannibal just lives with it, unable to kill Will for making him feel the way he does or in order to get back at him. When it used to be that Hannibal could harm him for his betrayals as an act of forgiveness.

Now Will doesn't know how the forgiveness is given, if at all. All he used to know was pain, and now Hannibal's love comes with a certain kind of melancholy that Will knows means there's something missing. He just doesn't know what. He doesn't know if it's because Hannibal resents him for trying to kill him, or if Hannibal feels bad for not being able to offer Will all the things he seeks.

Sometimes he wishes Hannibal *would* just kill him and eat him so all of this confusion and guilt would be obsolete.

Their love is a tumultuous path and he often feels like he has to navigate it alone. He knows it's partially his fault, but it doesn't make it easier.

It just makes him want to fall to his knees and beg for forgiveness, to promise over and over and over that he wishes he didn't try to kill them, and that he is content and *happy* to be here with Hannibal. He wants to show Hannibal all the love he possibly can and hope that one day Hannibal either accepts it and brings himself to speak again, or that he finally just kills him so Will *knows* that there's no fixing it.

But Hannibal would never kill him, so he has to live with the things he feels until something gives.

The guilt may just eat him alive if Hannibal can't.

Chapter End Notes

As always, please leave comments and let me know what you think.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

if you thought last chapter was an oucher… this one kinda hurt to write lol

please leave comments and lmk what you think!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Will leaves the bathroom, long after the shower has run cold, he finds that Hannibal has picked the bedroom lock. He now lays on their bed under the covers, all three dogs laying next to, or on top of, him.

He's sleeping. Or pretending to, at least.

Will knows he can't keep Hannibal out of their shared room (that would be rude), but he wishes the lock would have deterred him a bit more than it had.

As he gets closer to the bed, Will can see the telltale signs that Hannibal has been crying. His cheeks are red and puffy, and even though they're closed, Will knows his eyes are too. Tears streak his face, glistening each time the light through the window shifts from the trees blowing in the wind right outside.

Will snaps his fingers and Winston gets down from the bed, but the other two just look at him with their big puppy eyes and thump their tails against Hannibal's body. The older man still doesn't move at all. *Pretending to sleep, for sure,* Will thinks. Maybe it's so Will feels less threatened (not that he does feel that way at all) and climbs into bed beside Hannibal. He must think Will is avoiding him, and decided that pretending to sleep would be the easiest way to have him close without him feeling smothered.

Or maybe Hannibal doesn't want Will to see him crying.

Will just wants some space.

He gets some pajamas from his closet and takes them down the hall to Hannibal's old room. Winston follows him and immediately goes and jumps into the bed. He curls up in a small circle and Will climbs over him to lay on the side closest to the wall.

He sleeps for a while, and only wakes when the bed shifts and a warm weight presses against his back. An arm falls over his waist and holds him close. Kisses dot the back of his neck, and he just stays still in the dark room. Hannibal is so gentle in the way he kisses Will's neck and rubs a hand over the scar on his stomach. Will knows he has fucked up.

"I'm sorry," Will chokes out.

Hannibal nuzzles the back of his neck, and pulls Will even closer.

“It was good,” Will continues. “It was… I just needed space after and I know I should have communicated that, but I couldn’t.”

Hannibal brings his hand up to cover Will’s mouth gently, and Will knows he is being told to shut up. That everything is fine, and that he’s forgiven. But Will doesn’t feel fine or forgiven. He pulls Hannibal’s hand away and takes a deep, stuttering breath.

“I’m so sorry,” he says again, turning around to face Hannibal. He buries his face in the older man’s bare chest, and holds him tight. “I’m so sorry. For everything. For today. For trying to kill us… and for *everything.* I love you so much, Hannibal. I do, I swear. I would go back and change it all just to make you believe me. I would make things right if I could, change everything bad that has ever happened so that we could be together without so much fucking pain… but I can’t,” he sobs. “I wish I could fix it all, but I feel like I just keep on fucking it up.”

Hannibal rubs a hand up and down Will’s back to soothe him, but it hardly works. Instead, he begins to cry, heaving with each breath as he tries to pull himself back together. Hannibal just kisses the top of his head over and over.

Will really wishes the other man could speak right now.

Hannibal holds Will tight until he falls asleep, tiring himself out from the sobbing.

Will thinks he may have heard Hannibal whisper, “I love you,” but he truly can’t be sure, just on the edge of asleep and awake, not sure if he really hears it, or if it’s just what he wants to hear.

After this night, everything feels different. Hannibal doesn’t touch him how he used to. Will doesn’t wake up to blowjobs or hungry kisses. He doesn’t find Hannibal pressed against his back while he makes himself snacks in the kitchen. Hannibal doesn’t even pull Will into his lap on the couch like he has been doing for weeks now.

Will grows frustrated, both sexually and with Hannibal. He spends his nights alone in his room, jerking off by himself at the thought of everything Hannibal no longer wants to do to him. On two occasions he presses two lubed up fingers inside him, stretching himself around them. He can’t get the angle right, can’t get off from that alone, and it’s not the fingers of who he wants. He ends up pulling them out and calling it a night both times, not even bothering to touch his cock or get off at all in the end.

On the day that marks two weeks following them having sex on the couch, Hannibal doesn’t even bring Will lunch at the shop. Sometimes he misses a few days, and that's fine, but this is the third day in a row, and considering Hannibal didn’t even sleep in the same bed as him last night, he finds he has reasons to be upset.

He closes up for the day and goes home.

“What the fuck is up with you?” Will asks, storming into the kitchen. The dogs look at him from their spots beside Hannibal, then back up to the cake he’s frosting on the counter. “You haven’t touched me in *two weeks* . You don’t bring me lunch anymore. You’re making a *cake?”*

Hannibal just glances at him and shrugs.

“I’m going out. Don’t wait up for me,” Will hisses.

He leaves, he slams the door, he walks away.

He finds a bar, empty now that it’s midday, and orders a whiskey. And another. And another. It begins to fill later in the evening, but he doesn’t talk to any of the occupants. He tips the bartender generously just so he'll keep the drinks coming even after Will should have been cut off.

By the time Will stumbles home, it’s late and he’s drunk, and he’s forgotten why he’s mad.

Until he walks in the door and finds Hannibal sitting on the couch with his cell phone in hand, a call in progress. Hannibal hangs up as soon as Will comes fully into the room, but Will still sees the screen.

“Fuck you,” Will mutters.

Hannibal just tilts his head at him, no words coming from his mouth.

“Fuck you,” Will says again, louder this time. He slurs his next words, hiccuping between a couple. “Y’think I don’t fucking kno-o-ow that you can sp-speak?”

Hannibal doesn’t say anything, of course he doesn’t.

“I’ve been so-o-o patient,” Will slurs, moving closer to where Hannibal sits on the couch. He bumps into the coffee table and holds back the curse he nearly lets out. “Why can’t you just talk t’ me?”

Hannibal reaches out to grab onto his hand but Will shakes him away.

“Don’t fuckin’ touch me,” he growls. “Fuck. You.”

Will turns and paces around the room, knowing that whatever comes out next is going to be hurtful. That’s what he wants. He’s felt hurt for the last two weeks, and now he decides Hannibal deserves whatever he has coming.

He stomps right over to Hannibal, who is standing now, and pushes at his chest. Hard enough to make Hannibal stumble backwards. He doesn’t react otherwise. He doesn’t reach out to steady Will or stop him. He just takes it.

“You can speak to everyone but me,” Will says, shoving him again. Hannibal, again, doesn’t react. “You put yourself in every position that has ever gone wrong for you. Oh po-o-or Hannibal Lecter, stuck in prison for shit *he* fucking *did.* Almost getting killed by the very

man he *abused* and *hurt* for fucking years! Poor Hannibal fucking Lecter can't face his own fucking guilt and pretends he can't speak just to get out of apologizing to me."

Will is aware of the tears forming in Hannibal's eyes but he pushes on, continuing to shove at the man who just stands there and takes it.

"You want my fucking sympathy, well you're not fucking getting it. You have nightmares? You think it justifies all the pain you put me through? Oh so sorry, baby, but you *were* my nightmare for years, you get that right?" Will yells. "I've been loving and I've been patient, and I've had my entire life turned upside down and I've done it for *you!* And I walk in here, after two weeks of you not even *touching* me, and I see you on the fucking phone after *months* of you not speaking to me. Do you understand how bad that hurts?" Will pauses, meeting Hannibal's eyes, and whispers, "Do you know how bad it hurts to love you?"

Hannibal opens his mouth, and Will thinks this is it—months of silence will finally come to an end. Instead of words, though, a choked out sound is all he hears before Hannibal turns away from him. His shoulders shake with sobs, and Will's anger washes away almost immediately.

He moves forward, still drunk, but sobering up from both the walk home and his outburst, and now Hannibal's vulnerable display. He plasters himself against Hannibal's back and breaks down crying himself as he wraps his arms around Hannibal's waist.

It's the closest they've been in two weeks, and if the contact were under different circumstances, it would be euphoric to have Hannibal back in his arms. As it is, though, it feels terrible. They shake, leaning against each other, until Hannibal sinks to his knees, down to the floor. Will goes with him, sitting down behind him, side pressed to Hannibal's back. He rests his back against the couch, and considers wrapping his arms around Hannibal again, but refrains. Will feels awful for everything he said, and he doesn't know how they'll come back from this one. He doesn't know if his touch is still welcome.

"I'm sorry," Will whispers. "I'm drunk, and I'm angry, and I shouldn't have said any of that."

Hannibal just stands up and leaves the room.

Will doesn't know where Hannibal goes, but he's hungry, so he goes into the kitchen to find something to eat. On the counter is the cake Hannibal was making. Four words written on it in perfect cursive. A question Will didn't think he'd be asked any time soon. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, thinking that maybe he just misread it because there's no fucking way it says *that.*

A second later, the front door opens and slams shut, and he knows Hannibal has left. Winston comes into the kitchen, but Monster and Ripper are missing. Winston looks sad to have been left behind, and Will knows Hannibal has taken the two pups for a walk.

He weighs his options. He's way too fucking drunk to go running after Hannibal. He's hungry and tired, and he wishes he didn't say any of the shit he said, but he did, and he can't change that.

He's confused as shit, too. He looks down at the cake, sees the question that has not changed since the first time he read it. Hannibal hasn't touched him in two weeks, but he… Will shakes his head. He knows how he feels. His answer isn't any different today than it would have been two weeks ago, or three, or four, or maybe even a year ago, if he's being honest.

Will picks up the bag of icing and writes his answer just below the question.

He then finds a bottle of champagne in the fridge, along with a plate of prosciutto roses, and he takes the plate and the bottle out onto the veranda to sit in the dark with Winston beside him.

He eats the meat, and drinks half the bottle of champagne, and he stares off into the backyard of their home. They don't have any neighbors visible from their house because of the trees lining their property. He knows the neighbors aren't too far, but it's a nice illusion and he can usually pretend they live in the middle of nowhere.

That's why, when he's done with his plate, he strips off all of his clothes and dives into their pool naked.

He knows he shouldn't swim while intoxicated, and he knows he especially shouldn't do it while he's home alone, but he finds he doesn't care anymore.

After swimming a few laps, he pulls himself out and finds a towel draped over the couch he had been laying on. His plate has been cleaned up, and the champagne bottle has been brought back inside. He dries himself off, and peers through the sliding glass door, but Hannibal isn't in the kitchen anymore. Will doesn't know if he should go find him yet or not, so instead he pulls a blanket from a chest next to the door, and settles down on the couch.

Overhead he watches the airplanes pass, and looks for constellations until he feels drowsy, listening to the sounds of nature around him.

As he lays there he thinks of the cake on the counter—he's done what he can, and he believes that it's up to Hannibal to come to him now. Will has given him his answer, and has told him how he feels, even if it was just one single word. If, between the time Hannibal made the cake and Will yelling at him, he has decided that's not what he wants anymore, then there's nothing Will can do about that. All he can do is wait and hope.

The outside light coming on wakes Will, and he sits up to see Hannibal coming outside. He holds several things in his hands that Will can't make out yet as he squints, waiting for his eyes to adjust.

He's not drunk anymore, not as much as he was when he fell asleep, at least, so he must have slept for quite a while. It's still night, but he knows he passed out fairly early. His head is *much, much* clearer, and he sees the man he loves and wants to hold him in his arms and kiss him until Hannibal believes in his love again.

Hannibal comes over and sits on the edge of the couch, a cushion between them, and sets all of the items gently onto the table in front of him.

A glass of water and a bottle of aspirin are set in Will's hands, and they are taken again once the water is finished and the pills are swallowed. Will murmurs his thanks, and picks up one of Hannibal's hands so he can kiss the knuckles, grateful for now and apologetic for earlier.

Hannibal turns his attention back to the table, and Will follows his eyes to the items sitting there. He first picks up a piece of paper and hands it over to Will, who rubs his eyes to get rid of the tiredness in them. Feeling chilled from sleeping outside, he pulls the blanket tighter around him while he reads.

There is a great deal I wish I could say to you. Yes, you know that I am capable of speaking to others, and I will not deny that. Understand, though, that it is still limited. I've only been able to talk to Chiyoh, and a handful of merchants at the farmer's market. I've attempted to speak to you, as I am sure you know, but the words simply won't come out.

I will not do you the disservice of apologizing over paper, or text message, again as I see it did not hold the first time I did it. I will say that I won't lie to you any longer about my progress, or who I am speaking to.

While your anger hurts me, I understand your feelings, and I understand that my actions will always have consequences. You have taught me that I cannot get away with everything, nor do I think I should be allowed to anymore. You hold me accountable when I won't do it for myself.

As for not touching you these last two weeks—I have been scared. It's easier for me to choose isolation than it is for me to watch you pull away, and easier than you pushing me away. I failed to consider how it would hurt you.

I love you, and I was hoping to make today a special day for us. If you recall, it's been six years since we met in Jack Crawford's office. I know you saw the cake, and the champagne, and I hope with all my heart your answer remains the same.

Will sets the paper down, and sees that Hannibal has shifted off the couch and onto the ground. He is kneeling on one knee, with a ring box open in his hands. The ring looks old, but well-taken care of. A cornflower blue sapphire sits in the center between two snake heads, their fangs acting as the prongs. The intertwined body of the snakes make up the band of the ring.

"Yes," Will nods. "Yeah, Hannibal."

Hannibal smiles and carefully pulls the ring from the box to put it on Will's finger. He pulls Will in for a gentle, but passionate kiss, cupping his cheeks. Their first kiss in two weeks.

He picks up another piece of paper and hands it to Will.

This ring has been in my family for centuries. I replaced the diamond with a sapphire, as I thought it would suit you better. Chiyoh retrieved it when she went home to Lithuania. The snakes are symbolic of the Lecter family crest. Unfortunately the matching ring was stolen off my father's corpse when I was young. My mother had the foresight to hide hers in the castle before we were forced to leave.

“And you want me to have it?” Will asks. “You want me to be a Lecter?”

Hannibal nods, still on his knee in front of Will, hands holding Will’s own tight between them.

“We can’t get married,” Will whispers. “Can we?”

Hannibal shrugs, and that’s just fine. They can be whatever they want to be to each other, whether they’re legally bound or not. He has a feeling Hannibal can make it work, and that feeling is good enough.

He leans down and kisses Hannibal, starting soft and gentle, but quickly turning needy and desperate. Hannibal rises up, lips still connected, and pushes Will back on the couch, crowding over him.

“Fuck me,” Will whispers against his lips. “I’m ready, and I’ve been thinking about it for weeks, and I want you so bad.”

Hannibal pulls back with a slightly skeptical look, assessing the truth in Will’s words. He seems satisfied with what he finds because he nods, and holds up a finger signaling for Will to wait a minute.

When he returns, he has a handful of condoms and a bottle of lubricant, and sets them down on the table in front of the couch. He joins Will again, pulling the blanket away from him and leaving Will naked.

Hannibal moves down his body and takes Will’s cock into his mouth, working him to hardness with his tongue. Will throws his head back against the cushion and only lifts it again when he hears the cap on the lube click.

He bites back a loud groan as Hannibal pushes one finger inside him, remembering that, while their neighbors aren’t visible from their yard, they might not appreciate hearing a grown man moaning in the middle of the night.

Hannibal’s mouth is hot and wet around him, and his finger brushes his prostate with each gentle thrust inside, and Will knows he won’t last if this is kept up for much longer.

Seeming to read his mind, Hannibal pulls back, wipes his mouth with his free hand, and moves forward to press a kiss to Will’s lips. Another finger pushes inside the first, and Will feels the stretch, but it’s not so bad.

Hannibal nuzzles his neck, leaving gentle kisses as he works his fingers in and out of Will’s body. Will pulls one knee up toward his chest to give Hannibal more room, and gasps when Hannibal is able to push his fingers in deeper.

Another finger, and Will bites his lip to stop himself from crying out. It’s more than he’s ever got in on his own.

Hannibal sits up and rubs a hand up and down his chest, gently petting him to soothe him. Will relaxes and nods.

“I’m okay,” he affirms.

What feels like hours later, Hannibal finally withdraws his fingers and stands. He removes all of his clothes slowly, allowing Will to watch him strip. As more and more skin is revealed, Will finds himself trembling more and more. Fear, anticipation, *need.* He knows he doesn’t need to be scared—Hannibal will take his time not to hurt him, just as he did while opening Will up with his fingers—but he can’t help the uncertainty that sits in his gut over this new experience.

Still, he wants it so bad. He needs it.

And he won’t run away after this time.

To calm his nerves, he busies himself with opening a condom, trying to concentrate on making his hands shake less. Hannibal ends up taking it from him anyway, tearing it open himself. He hands it back to Will, who sits up and strokes Hannibal’s cock a few times before rolling the condom down it.

Hannibal’s hitching breaths, and oh so quiet moans of pleasure, remind Will that this man loves him, and wants him just as badly. The feeling of the hard cock his hand is wrapped around reminds Will that Hannibal is affected by *him.* Will did this to him.

Will lays back down, but Hannibal shakes head and bends down. He lifts Will into his arms, a laugh coming from Will’s mouth as he’s manhandled and moved. Hannibal turns and sits on the couch, Will in his lap.

Hannibal lifts Will up by one of his thighs and grabs his own cock with his own hand. Will feels the press of the head against his hole and falls forward, clinging to Hannibal’s shoulders and head as he lowers himself.

Even with Hannibal’s careful preparation, it’s almost too much to take. He takes his time lowering himself, and when he’s fully seated, he takes a few minutes to adjust. Clinging to Hannibal’s neck, he gives a few experimental rolls of his hips, both of them gasping as he does.

Hannibal’s hands move over Will’s body, gasping and sliding over every inch of bare skin he can reach.

These hands that have hurt him and nursed him back to health, alike. Hands that carried him through the snow after escaping Muskrat farm, and hands that clung to him as they went over the cliff.

Now they grip his ass and encourage him to move.

Will obliges.

The initial pain subsides and jolts of pleasure thrum through his entire body as Hannibal’s cock hits his prostate with each bounce of his body in Hannibal’s lap. Hannibal tilts his head up toward Will and they stare into each other’s eyes.

Tears fall down Hannibal's cheeks, which Will quickly kisses away.

"I love you," Will whispers.

It feels like all he can say now. What else is there? He's torn Hannibal apart with his words today, he tried reaching into his throat and pulling out words that he had no right trying to extract. Everything he's said has cut and maimed, but here Hannibal is, crying because he's overwhelmed with his own love for Will. Crying because he never thought in a million years they'd end up right here—making love under the stars, *engaged,* and in love with each other. Will understands it completely.

He rocks in Hannibal's lap, the other man's arms wrapped so tightly around him it makes it harder to move much more than that. It's a long time before Will's orgasm is torn from his body, leaving him shuddering and crying out as he spills across Hannibal's stomach and clenches around his cock. Hannibal slams up into his body several times before they both collapse onto the couch, sticky and panting.

Hannibal lifts him up and slips out from his body, but Will doesn't let him get much further.

They end up horizontal on the sofa outside, and Hannibal pulls the blanket up over both of them.

"Should we go in?" Will asks. He yawns and kisses Hannibal's shoulder, then his neck.

He doesn't look up for an answer before he falls asleep, cuddling against Hannibal's chest for warmth.

Will is not running this time. He's never running ever again. He's found his place in Hannibal's arms, and he has decided that it's where he wants to stay. No more freak outs, no more outbursts. Just him and Hannibal.

Whatever that may entail.

Chapter End Notes

> the cake says "will you marry me?" btw in case it's not clear. i tried being clever and secretive so it could be revealed when hannibal gave him the ring but i'm not sure if that worked out

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for taking so long on this one. Please leave comments and kudos!!!
>
> I'm removing the total chapter count for the time being because I'm taking this in a slightly different direction than originally planned, so I'll need to re-outline the remaining chapters before I know for sure how long this will be

In the coming days, Will tries his best not to let his ring slip off his finger every time he uses his hand. Unfortunately, it seems Hannibal's family has bigger fingers than him, and a ring so old would be a risk to resize. He takes it off while he works, slipping it into his pocket or in the drawer of his desk at the shop. He would die if he lost it, but it's just not the right size.

Will goes to Hannibal one afternoon when he gets home from the shop. Hannibal is sitting on the sofa in the living room, reading glasses on his nose, and a book in his hand. He takes the book from his fiance's hand and sets it to the side so he can climb into his lap. He sits with his knees on either side of Hannibal and sits on his thighs, hands on his shoulders. Hannibal removes his reading glasses, and places his hands on Will's hips, looking at him inquisitively.

"This ring keeps slipping off my finger," Will tells him. He removes his hands from Hannibal's shoulders and takes Hannibal's left hand. He slides the ring off his own finger and onto Hannibal's, then brings his knuckles up for a kiss. "Fits you perfectly."

Hannibal pulls his hand away and holds it out in front of him, eyeing the ring on his finger.

"I love it, Hannibal," Will assures him. "I just don't want to lose it. You keep it safe for me."

Will kisses Hannibal softly, then climbs out of his lap to lay down on the couch with his feet in Hannibal's lap.

"You can get me a new one," Will suggests, raising an eyebrow. "Something simple, though, you know? Something I can clean easily if it gets motor oil on it."

Hannibal nods and flashes Will a smile before picking up his book again.

Will watches him as he obviously pretends to read the book. He shoves his bare toes under Hannibal's thigh to warm them up. Hannibal glares at him, and Will just offers a lopsided grin in response.

"I know you aren't really reading," Will says after ten minutes. He sits up and turns around so he can rest his head in Hannibal's lap. He looks up at his fiancé, who doesn't seem

embarrassed to have been caught. Hannibal just drops his hand to Will's head and begins carding his fingers through his hair.

Will tells him about his day, going on and on about the new hires at the shop and how much they still have to learn. He's grateful for the extra help, though, and he knows both Remy and Amelie are grateful for it as well. Hannibal smiles at him as he talks, fond and affectionate. He runs his hand through Will's hair, over his cheeks and neck. Touching just about anywhere he can.

It's been easy since the night outside.

They haven't had sex since, but Will doesn't find that worrisome. Hannibal sleeps in bed with him, and holds him close, and they have plenty of moments like now, where their relationship is easy and he feels warm all over. He thinks Hannibal might be waiting for Will to make the next move, but Will is tired a lot, working long hours, and entertaining the dogs. He usually comes home, sits with Hannibal on the couch for an hour, and then showers while Hannibal makes dinner for them. He only lasts about an hour after dinner before he goes up to bed. That hour is usually spent throwing a ball for the dogs in the yard to work out some of their energy, or swimming a few laps in the pool.

Today is different, though.

Today, Will is filled with a certain type of want that he really can't ignore. All day he's been thinking about how he saw Hannibal sprawled out in the morning in just his tiny briefs in their shared bed. Will almost woke him up to take care of Hannibal's half-hard cock, but he was already running late to open the shop, so he couldn't. Throughout the entire work day he thought of the way Hannibal had rolled over when Will got out of bed, moving from his stomach to his back, unconsciously spreading his legs enough that Will could have easily fit between them. He thought of running his tongue along the outline of his cock through the fabric, of feeling Hannibal twitch and fill out under his tongue. He caught himself fantasizing about it while he was trying to do paperwork in the office. He came home several hours early because of it.

Now, he thinks of it again. He could just turn his head and unzip Hannibal's pants and then he could take him into his mouth and—

Will gasps when Hannibal cups his cock through his jeans. Will didn't even realize how hard he had become imagining all the things he wanted to do, but now that Hannibal is palming him, it's apparent just how aroused he is.

Hannibal isn't even looking at what he's doing, having gone back to reading his book when Will fell silent a while ago.

"It turns out I probably am gay," Will manages to say.

That causes Hannibal to laugh silently and set down his book, finally giving Will his full attention. He maneuvers Will into his lap and pulls down Will's zipper. He pulls Will's erection from his underwear and wraps his hand around it, setting a slow pace while he kisses Will's neck.

Will gasps and writhes in Hannibal's lap as the man jerks him off. Hannibal's free hand is settled firmly on Will's ass, kneading the flesh through Will's pants. Will grinds forward, thrusting into Hannibal's hand to try to make him stroke him faster.

It's not long before he comes on Hannibal's shirt, panting and moaning while Hannibal works him to the point of oversensitivity.

He buries his face in Hannibal's throat to catch his breath and when he pulls back and goes for Hannibal's zipper, he finds a wet spot. Hannibal hisses when Will palms his softening cock, causing Will to smirk at him.

"Never really pegged you as the kind of guy to finish that fast without even getting your dick out," Will comments, biting his lip to keep himself from laughing. He kisses Hannibal's frown off his face, and adds, "Kind of embarrassing."

Will tucks himself back into his pants, and goes to stand, but Hannibal wraps his arms around his waist and pulls him back down. He nips at Will's throat, not very hard, but the press of sharp teeth is evident. Hannibal killed Dolarhyde with his teeth in the exact same spot, but Will doesn't feel any danger. He feels Hannibal smile against his throat, both of them aware Will is just teasing.

"Let go of me. I was going to write a letter to Jack Crawford about your tendency to cum in your pants," Will jokes. "He might get a kick out of it."

Hannibal scowls at him and a moment later Will is being thrown over Hannibal's shoulder as the older man stands. Will yelps, taken by surprise at the quick movement. He knows Hannibal is strong—this isn't the first time something like this has happened—but it always causes arousal to pool in his stomach whenever it shows. If he hadn't just come, Hannibal carrying him out of the room and up the stairs without even breaking a sweat would have made him hard again instantaneously.

So, yeah. Maybe Will *is* gay.

He carries him up to their bedroom and tosses Will onto the bed, then disappears into the closet. He comes back with just a pair of clean underwear on, and tosses his dirty clothes into the laundry basket. Over one of his arms is a suit that he lays out on the bed for Will.

' *Get dressed,'* Hannibal signs with his hands. *'Dinner.'*

"We're going out?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods and Will rolls out of bed.

"Do I have time to shower?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods again and then leaves the room.

Will comes downstairs, showered and dressed, to find Hannibal in the kitchen, fully dressed in a suit that complements Will's. They're both in blacks and dark greens—Hannibal's suit

green, with black waistcoat, tie, and shirt with Will in the opposite. Hannibal must have had the suit in his—mostly unused—bedroom and gotten dressed after he left their shared room.

The dogs are let outside once more, and then fed. They settle down in their beds as Hannibal picks up the car keys, and Will goes and kisses each of their heads, uncaring if their fur transfers to his suit.

They end up at a fancy restaurant, secluded in a corner of the room. Will tries not to worry about the prices on the menu—he knows they can afford it—but it's still a surprise. Hannibal points to what he wants and Will is the one to order each course for both of them. They share a bottle of wine between them. Will doesn't drink too much, allowing Hannibal to indulge all he wants, saying he'll drive them home.

Whenever he can, Hannibal holds one of Will's hands across the table, the sapphire in his ring glinting in the light of the restaurant each time he moves his hand. Will's entire body feels warm with love at the reminder that they've accepted each other and themselves.

It's all around a nice evening.

Until they leave the restaurant.

Hannibal guides Will down the street to a bar.

They're severely overdressed, but Hannibal seems at ease, regardless. He directs Will over to the bar, who orders drinks for the both of them. They sit side by side at a high top table drinking with each other. Will doesn't question why they're here, and Hannibal doesn't pull out a notepad to explain himself. He tries to enjoy the evening.

That is cut short just after Hannibal kisses Will fully on the mouth, their tongues brushing against each other. Will can't help but reach out to grip Hannibal's thigh for balance, perhaps a bit too high.

He pulls away with a smile that immediately fades when a drunk man yells at them. It makes him feel awful, and, even though he can't fully understand the words the man is saying, Will is filled with shame. Hannibal squeezes his hand reassuringly, and Will knows he's trying to remind him that there's nothing wrong with him, and Will can almost, almost believe it, but forty years of repression and fear doesn't just completely disappear.

But he knows he needs to confront this fear.

Will spins around on his stool and finds a familiar face behind him. He doesn't immediately recall where he knows the man from, but a brush of Hannibal's hand over his thigh, and a glance at the older man, and Will knows.

This is the man Hannibal wants to kill. The man who they have an entire life's worth of information on sitting in a drawer in their kitchen.

He's still yelling at them in angry, slurred French. Will can't understand more than a few words, but he knows it can't be good. He stands, stalking up to him. Hannibal grabs for his

wrist, but Will knows it's just for show.

Will doesn't do anything. He doesn't say anything. He stares him down as the man continues to hurl incoherent insults at him and Hannibal. He makes eye contact with him, seeing years and years of hatred within his eyes. He sees it all, and he sees everyone from his past that had similar views.

He formulates a plan and a design within seconds.

"C'mon, baby," Will says, turning back to Hannibal. He pulls him out of the bar by his wrist. "Let's get out of here."

No one else has been paying them any mind, and the bartender is engrossed in conversation with someone else. Hopefully no one has seen any sort of altercation between this man and them. It wouldn't do well for them to be recognized by someone in the bar and have them questioned by police when this man shows up dead.

He whispers to Hannibal what their plan is as they walk out of the bar. He has one arm around his waist, holding him close, as if they're sharing a secret about what Will is going to do once they get home. To anyone else, the way Hannibal grips Will's shirt in return and his step falters, would look like he's hearing something arousing. Maybe it *is* arousing to him, to hear Will whisper about how they're going to kill a man together. Will finishes as they step outside, leaving a smacking kiss to Hannibal's cheek as he pulls away and pushes Hannibal into position.

They don't have to wait long outside the bar. In fact, it's barely ten minutes before the man comes stumbling out of the doors and spots Will. He comes running down the sidewalk, certainly ready to assault Will, who stands out in the open.

Hannibal steps out from an alley just as the man passes him, just shy of where Will was standing as bait. Will watches Hannibal's strong arms wrap around the drunk's body, one around his waist, the other near his chest. A hand moves up to his throat and begins to squeeze as he drags the man into the alleyway he had been hiding in.

Will goes in after them, hearing the heavy thump of the body hitting the ground. Hannibal pulls the car keys from his pocket and tosses them to Will.

He knows what he has to do without being told.

Once Will retrieves the car, he finds that Hannibal has bound and gagged their victim, though he also appears to be unconscious on top of it. Hannibal gets him into the trunk, and then slides into the passenger seat. He puts their home address into the GPS and signals for Will to drive.

Will lasts about ten minutes before he can't hold it in any more.

"You could understand everything he said, couldn't you?" Will asks.

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Hannibal nod. He reaches over and puts a hand on Will's knee.

"And you're… you're okay?" Will asks. He already knows Hannibal is just fine. This kind of thing is below Hannibal's standards for things to be worried about (for himself, at least. Will knows that Hannibal would be concerned for *him* if he expressed his discomfort—which he knows he has to so it doesn't happen again. He's working up to that.). He's got the perpetrator in the trunk, soon to be dead, and that's all that matters to Hannibal in this situation when it comes to himself and his own feelings.

A squeeze of his hand, and another nod. Will glances over at him and he sees the question in his expression.

Will takes a deep breath and shakes his head.

"I… could understand enough," Will admits. "I grew up around men like him. It was familiar."

Hannibal squeezes Will's leg again, an encouragement to speak.

"Just to… shed some light on my perspective and upbringing…" Will says, trailing off as he gathers his thoughts. "I grew up in the Bible belt. I was a teenager during the height of the AIDS epidemic," Will continues. "I've spent my entire life full of so much fear, and that was just another thing for me to worry about, and I didn't want to. I didn't want to be scared. I *don't* , but all of that prejudice is so ingrained inside me, and it's awful. Sometimes I still hear all of the things people have said when something, well, gay happens to me. Terrible things that would instill fear in me, and sometimes still do. So, I've experienced this, and witnessed it, and… I don't know. I didn't want those things to apply to *me.* Everyone already thought I was a freak because of my empathy, and I didn't need to be gay on top of it."

Will takes a shaky breath, focusing on the road as he drives.

"Not that being gay makes me, or anyone, a freak," Will quickly adds. "Just—"

Hannibal squeezes his knee again, causing Will to cut himself off. He glances over at Hannibal to see him signing 'I know,' to him.

Will nods. He knows Hannibal understands what he means.

"I repressed it a lot," Will continues. "That's fucking obvious."

He falls silent when the man in the trunk cries out in fear and confusion.

"What happened in the bar felt like it was about to undo months of accepting myself," Will whispers.

He drops one hand from the steering wheel to rest over Hannibal's on his knee. Hannibal turns his hand over so they can link their fingers together, and that gives Will the courage to go on with what he needs to say. It's not that he's scared of Hannibal's reaction—Will is

scared he'll be the one to lose his own temper, and he's scared of being vulnerable—but he's still cautious as he continues.

"And I'm glad we're going to kill him, but I… don't want to experience that again intentionally, and especially not without warning. I know you set this up, knowing exactly what he would do, and I don't want you doing that again. You don't care what people say to *you,* I get that," Will sighs. Hannibal's hand squeezes his own in understanding and affirmation, urging Will on. "I know most scenarios are easy for you to disconnect yourself from. You can take a clinical, detached approach to almost any situation you're put in, you're comfortable in your identity, and you knew what he was going to say. I'm not fully comfortable, yet, and I can't detach myself when I see *everything* . You were prepared. I wasn't."

Hannibal nods and lifts both of their hands so he can kiss Will's in an apology. The man in their trunk is making more noise now, and Will, feeling too distracted, pulls his hand from Hannibal's grasp to have more control of his driving.

"I'm not claiming to know what it was like for you or how you've experienced life due to your sexuality," Will quickly adds. "I'm sure it wasn't easy, but I know that it's kind of hard for people to hurt your feelings when you view them as cuts of meat, and it's even harder to make you feel unsafe when you're a fucking… when you're *you. Jesus.* You just kill everyone who crosses you and then it's done and even then—" Will laughs quietly. "Even then, I'm pretty sure I'm the only person who could really hurt you, and… Well, you get it. All I'm saying is that we have different perspectives and ways of processing emotions. So that's just—I'm just asking for a bit of consideration on your part so I don't have to be in this situation again."

He knows he's rambling on and making his point several times over, but it's not something he has really thought through before because he didn't think he had to. He thinks Hannibal understands what he's saying. He hopes he does. The last thing he wants is another fight, which is why he has slipped into, what he thinks of as, lecturer mode. He feels like he's addressing his students back at Quantico, and not asking his cannibal husband to clue him in on their murder plans, and not explaining how repressed he is, or why. He spent a long time lecturing *about* Hannibal Lecter that it makes it easier to lecture *to* Hannibal Lecter. Still, he knows his voice has slipped from informative and authoritative to defensive and slightly aggressive at certain points, so he knows he has to remind Hannibal—

"I'm not mad at you," Will adds. "I just needed you to be clear on this."

Hannibal signs 'okay' within Will's line of sight.

"I love you," Will declares to reassure Hannibal they're just fine.

When they get home, Hannibal carries their intended victim into the house while Will holds the door for him. He knocked him unconscious the second he opened the trunk door, so now he's just a limp weight slung over Hannibal's shoulder.

Downstairs, Hannibal unbinds him and gets to work. A whiteboard on one of the walls has an entire plan written out, which Will goes to and reads.

In Hannibal's neat handwriting, he's mapped out a several day process for this kill.

"We're not killing him tonight?" Will asks, looking over his shoulder after he reads, *' 1. Detox overnight.'*

Hannibal shakes his head and comes to stand next to Will as soon as their victim is strapped down to an operating table.

He writes down, *'Too drunk,'* on the whiteboard.

"Alcohol is a blood thinner. So less of a mess if he sobers up?" Will asks.

Hannibal inclines his head.

"Does it change the taste?" Will asks.

Hannibal shrugs.

"You don't know?" Will asks incredulously.

'Never tested it,' Hannibal writes.

"Oh. Huh," Will says.

Hannibal writes, *'I usually would not pick someone with such a history, as it affects the liver, but we will simply throw his away and take what is good.'*

He erases all of the added messages so just his list remains. He wraps an arm around Will's shoulders, and brings him over to the operating table to watch what he does. He briefly unstraps the man to remove all of his clothes, then attaches an IV to his arm, and inserts a catheter for urine. When finished, he removes the gloves he was wearing and rewashes his hands.

Upstairs, Will takes care of the dogs while Hannibal showers again. He has another drink, and loosens his tie as he sips it. The dogs eat their dinner while he sits at the kitchen counter, staring off at the door to the basement, securely locked so that, even if their victim gets out of his binds, he won't be able to get out of the basement without several different keys. All of which, Will has in his own pocket because Hannibal wanted to relinquish control of the situation over to Will, or something like that. Will didn't ask, just took the key ring when Hannibal held it out to him.

By the time he finishes his drink, lets the dogs out one last time, and makes it upstairs to their bedroom, Hannibal is laid out on their bed in nothing but his briefs. Will quickly undresses down to his boxers, throwing his suit over a chair, and nearly falling as he removes his socks.

Hannibal pats his thigh and Will crosses the room to climb into his lap. He straddles Hannibal's hips, and looks down at him. He trails his fingers over the various scars littering Hannibal's stomach and chest and arms, just like how Hannibal likes to do with Will's scar on his stomach. Will didn't give him any of these personally, but he knows the shot from

Dolarhyde is because Hannibal stepped between Will and the window. He knows the scars on Hannibal's wrists are from his own words sending Matthew Brown to make an attempt on his life. He lifts Hannibal's wrists one by one to kiss a line across the white scars.

He remembers how grateful he was when he found out Hannibal had survived the attack. Even if he was angry with him at the time, even if his life was in shambles because of him, even if he was plotting to have Hannibal arrested. He didn't truly want Hannibal dead.

Will bends forward, so he can kiss Hannibal's chest, right over his heart. He scoots down lower so he can kiss the scar tissue from the bullet wound on Hannibal's abdomen. He moves back up to lay several kisses on Hannibal's throat, up to his jaw, on the scar on his cheekbone.

Hannibal's hands stay at his sides, palms on the mattress. He allows Will his quiet exploration with barely any movement and no protest. Will knows that tonight has set himself back, and it's clear Hannibal is aware of that, as well. It helps to know that Hannibal wants Will to take his time, and understand what he wants with no influence. Neither of them want Will to have another freak out because things move too fast.

That helps. That makes it easier. That makes Will braver.

"I thought about you all day today," Will whispers into his ear. "Woke up to you nearly naked in my bed, legs spread out like you were begging for me to get between them. Wanted to wake you up by sucking you off."

Hannibal sucks in a sharp breath, and his resolve shatters for a split second as he grinds his hips upwards, his erection sliding against Will's ass, just two thin layers of fabric separating them.

"Ah, ah, ah" Will admonishes, lifting himself on his knees so Hannibal can't reach him anymore. "Wouldn't want you making a mess of your underwear again, now would we?"

Hannibal drops back down onto the mattress and covers his face with his hands. Will pries them away and leans down again to kiss Hannibal on the lips. He pins Hannibal's hands above his head, not wanting to let go yet, and laces their fingers together while they kiss.

"Can I fuck you?" Will asks, rubbing his nose against Hannibal's neck, just below his ear.

He kisses that spot and releases Hannibal's hands so he can touch his chest, bracing himself over Hannibal's body with hands on his pecs.

Hannibal is nodding emphatically at Will, trying to stretch toward his nightstand, but not quite able to reach. Will laughs and moves off of him so he can get what they need from the drawer.

The lube is handed to Will and Hannibal's underwear are flying across the room toward the laundry basket in the next ten seconds. Hannibal spreads his legs for Will, and Will moves up the bed to lay beside him instead of getting in between his legs. Hannibal shoves a pillow

under his hips as Will uncaps the lube and pours it onto his fingers. He presses close to Hannibal, laying on his side with a leg thrown over one of Hannibal's thighs.

Propped up on one elbow, Will uses his free hand to reach between Hannibal's legs. Hannibal turns his face toward him, catching Will's lips in a kiss just as Will breaches him with one fingertip.

"Oh," Will breathes when he finds Hannibal already slick and open.

Hannibal smirks against Will's lips.

"Did you anticipate this?" Will asks, his voice rough.

Hannibal nods and kisses him again.

He reaches out and palms Will's cock through his boxers, then pushes at the waistband impatiently.

"I got it," Will mumbles. He stands up and kicks them off, then finds himself between Hannibal's legs. He pushes three fingers inside him, watching for any signs of discomfort. When he finds none, he works them in and out at a quick pace, rubbing Hannibal's prostate so the man squirms and whimpers under him. He leans forward and whispers. "Did you do this in the shower? Thinking about me fucking you? What would you have done if I wanted you to fuck me instead?"

Hannibal shrugs as best as he can, and Will removes his fingers entirely, wiping them on the sheets.

He yells out in surprise when Hannibal lunges and flips them, Hannibal straddling Will now. He picks up the lube and coats Will's cock with it, then pushes up on his knees to line himself up. It takes a second for him to realize what Hannibal is doing, but when he does, he quickly darts out a hand and grabs his wrist to stop him.

"Condom?" Will asks. Hannibal reaches over for the nightstand again, but Will continues, "Unless… I'm fine without. If you are, I mean."

Hannibal raises an eyebrow at him, as if to ask, 'Are you sure?'

"Yes, yeah," Will confirms. He isn't opposed to the idea, not really. He knows Hannibal was able to get some blood tests done on them while they were in recovery—how, he doesn't really know—and they came up clean. He knows it's safe for them to have unprotected sex. Beyond safety concerns, he also thinks about coming inside of Hannibal, and nods enthusiastically at the idea.

Hannibal smiles at him, smug as shit. Will wants to kiss that grin off his face, but he's quickly distracted when Hannibal lines up and sinks down onto his cock.

"Fuck!" Will cries out.

Hannibal immediately starts moving, riding him like his life depends on it.

Will knows he won't last long like this.

He digs his fingers into Hannibal's hips hard enough to bruise and nearly tells him to slow down, but he finds himself speechless. The sight of Hannibal above him, the way it has *never* felt this way for him when he had sex with women, the overpowering pleasure he feels. It renders him completely stupid.

The only sounds he can make is incoherent babbling—disjointed declarations of love and devotion, apologies, and an enthusiastic ' *yes, yes, yes.'*

He wants to keep looking at Hannibal, but his eyes won't stay open, and he can't stop his back from arching, his head thrown back into the pillow. He vaguely registers the feeling of Hannibal placing his own hands over Will's on his hips, no longer using his hands for leverage, but not faltering either. Will groans thinking about the strength in Hannibal's thighs.

It's not lost on him that Hannibal is reminding him just how good this can be. Reminding him that, no matter what others may say about them, they can come home and be close and feel good, and be desperately in love with each other because it's no one's business but their own. That the negatives can be outweighed by positives.

That Hannibal can make his brain feel like it's liquid and spilling from his ears. That he can take Will's fear and squash it. He can remind him that he has overcome so much already, and he's here, having taken the plunge (literally) and chased the life with the person he loves, and that nothing can take this away from them.

Hannibal does slow down, giving Will time to reboot his brain so he can form coherent sentences again. He takes several deep breaths and opens his eyes again to see Hannibal's radiant smile, all sharp teeth. His eyes are soft with fondness as love, and his hands move from his own hips, down to Will's chest so he can lean forward a bit.

"You're a fucking—You're so—" Will gasps, struggling for words. He gives up, instead just groaning, " *God."*

Hannibal stills his movements completely as he leans forward to kiss him, his smile still wide as if he just can't quite get it under control. Will feels similarly.

"Keep going," Will pleads. "C'mon."

Hannibal kisses him once more before sitting up again. He moves Will's hands away from his hips and pins them above his head, exactly how Will did to him earlier.

He begins to move again, slow at first, and then faster, resuming the pace from before.

Will's a goner within seconds.

"Close, baby," Will warns. He grips Hannibal's thighs, who just moves faster. "Fuck, like *really* close, Hannibal. Don't fucking stop."

A small moan escapes Hannibal's lips as he grinds down hard onto Will, and that's all it takes. Will bucks his hips up, crying out as he comes deep inside Hannibal.

Hannibal keeps going, more quiet moans falling from his lips, and it's music to Will's ears as he rides Will through the aftershocks.

Will cries out again when it becomes too much, and Hannibal pulls off of Will's cock. He grabs Will's hand and moves it toward his hole, and Will slides his fingers inside him, pushing his cum back in while Hannibal fucks himself on his fingers.

Hannibal takes himself in his hand and gives himself a few strokes as Will fucks his fingers into his prostate. He tenses over Will as his climax hits him, coming across Will's bare stomach.

He pulls himself off of Will's fingers and collapses beside him, panting into Will's neck.

"Good?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods into his throat, his nose rubbing against his skin.

They lay together for several minutes, Hannibal's arm slung over Will's waist as if he's scared he'll flee again. Will wouldn't dream of it.

He turns his head so he can kiss Hannibal's hair.

Will realizes that he's barely thought of the man in their basement beyond passing thoughts of how Hannibal's love is stronger than any hate they can experience.

"Thank you," Will whispers. And he means it. Hannibal has provided him with a much-needed distraction tonight. It was perfect.

Hannibal lifts his head and kisses Will's mouth twice, then rolls over and climbs out of bed. He stumbles off toward the bathroom, but doesn't bother to shut the door.

Will is dragged out of bed not long later, his stomach is wiped with a warm washcloth, and then he's lifted up and deposited into the bathtub. He sinks into the warm water, and glances over to see Hannibal hopping into the shower. He frowns, wishing Hannibal would join him instead of showering on his own, but he quickly realizes Hannibal is just rinsing himself off.

Hannibal crosses the bathroom and gets into the tub with Will, settling with his back to Will's chest. He wraps his arms around Hannibal's chest, holding him tight. The lights are dim and the water is warm. Bubbles cover their bodies, their legs are tangled with each other's and Will's hands wander with no planned destination.

Will doesn't have anywhere to be in the morning, with someone else opening the shop, and Hannibal hasn't told him he has plans of his own except for their loose murder timeline. Besides the man in their basement, they don't have to worry about anything or anyone for the rest of the night or the next day. They have time to be happy with each other.

After fighting the week before, the tension between them diminished. It's been loving and easy. Will has been trying a lot harder to understand Hannibal and be more considerate of *him.* And he is glad he was able to ask Hannibal to do the same on their drive home without it turning into a fight. It feels like real progress has been made between them.

Their new life is comfortable.

He hopes Hannibal feels it, too.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

> Thank you to everyone reading this and leaving comments and kudos! I don't have much presence on Hannibal social media anymore so if you feel like sharing this fic with your friends, I'd really appreciate that.
>
> Please continue leaving comments. It helps me get chapters out much, much quicker than I otherwise would.

Will wakes in the morning to gentle hands and soft lips. Hannibal's breath can be felt on his temple where his nose is pressed, lips kissing his cheek. His fingertips caress the scar on his stomach, back and forth as if Hannibal is trying to make it go away. Hannibal's leg is settled over his thigh, and his erection pressed against Will's hip.

"Mornin'," Will murmurs, slowly blinking his eyes open. He turns his face so he can catch Hannibal's lips with his own. He sets his hand over the one on his stomach and laces their fingers together.

There's no urgency when Will turns over and presses the front of his body to Hannibal's. They wrap their arms around each other, and kiss despite Will's morning breath (Hannibal tastes like toothpaste, Will notices. He must have gotten up already and then come back to bed), languid movements of lips against each other's.

Hannibal slips one hand between their bodies and strokes Will to hardness, and there's still no urgency. Just the need to be with each other in the soft light of morning, still cozy from sleep and the warm bed. Hannibal wraps his hand around both of their erections, their hips rocking against each other, their foreheads pressed together.

Will, realizing his eyes have been closed, opens them to look at Hannibal's face.

His lips are parted, panting breaths falling from his mouth. Will leans forward and sucks on his bottom lip, pulling a quiet moan from Hannibal's lips.

"Will," Hannibal breathes. And that's it.

That's all it takes for tears to fill Will's eyes, and for a gasp to rip from his throat.

He throws himself at Hannibal, rolling him onto his back so he can fit between his legs. He kisses him hard, tears streaming down his face and onto Hannibal's.

Just a breath, but unmistakably his name—Will couldn't be happier.

He scrambles for the nightstand drawer and retrieves the lube. Hannibal just spreads his legs further and nods over and over again until Will pushes two fingers inside him.

“I love you,” Will whispers, leaning forward to kiss Hannibal again as he fingers him. “So much. Hannibal. *Fuck.* ”

He pulls his fingers out and replaces them with his cock, aching and demanding attention. He doesn’t think he’ll last long, but it doesn’t matter. He just wants to make Hannibal feel good. Hannibal grips his arms, then slides them around his shoulders to hold him tight. His legs come up and his ankles lock behind Will’s back, holding him so tight he can barely move.

“You don’t even know,” Will whispers as he begins to fuck Hannibal, barely moving out before pushing back in. He sets a quick pace, covering Hannibal’s body with his own. He kisses him everywhere he can reach, then pulls back to look into his eyes. He cups both of Hannibal’s cheeks with his hands as he continues to move inside him. “ *Fuck.* You’re so—It’s not so hard is it? You could say more. You know you could. It’s just me, baby. Fuck, I’m so close already. You did that. Just by saying my name. Do it again, and I’ll come so fucking hard. I can feel it.”

He leans in to kiss him again, but Hannibal turns his face to the side. Will pulls back and watches as Hannibal opens his mouth, but nothing comes out. His face changes to an expression of frustration, and he starts to pull away entirely, trying to slide out from under Will’s body. Will’s cock slips free from his body, and Hannibal tries to get out of bed.

Will knows he fucked up. He ran his mouth in the heat of the moment, and now he’s sat here with his achingly hard cock, and a feeling of dread. He needs to fix what he’s done—just as soon as he figures out precisely what he said wrong.

“Hey, hey,” Will soothes, reaching for Hannibal’s wrist, and pulling him back down. He doesn’t make a move to touch Hannibal elsewhere. “Hannibal, hey. It’s okay.”

Hannibal shakes his head, and turns away, sitting on the edge of the mattress. His shoulders begin to shake. He ends up laying back down on the bed and curling up on his side, not facing Will. His shoulders still shake, and Will knows he’s crying.

All the empathy he has, and he’s never quite figured out how to comfort someone. He can feel exactly what they feel, but he never knows what to do to make it better.

He sets a cautious hand on Hannibal’s bicep, and when he doesn’t flinch away, Will lays down behind him and wraps an arm around his waist. Hannibal seems to melt into his arms. Will buries his face in the back of his neck, and inhales. Hannibal smells like him. Will washed Hannibal’s hair with his own shampoo in the bath, and there’s the faint scent of the dogs, and the body wash they both use, and their laundry detergent. Hannibal is his—his entire life.

Whether he can speak or not.

Will shouldn’t have said anything about it. He shouldn’t have said that Hannibal speaking is what got him so riled up, even if that’s what happened. He shouldn’t have asked for more

words. He shouldn't have made such a big deal out of it being important.

He realizes now that Hannibal feels inadequate and vulnerable now. That he feels as though most of Will's ongoing attention is rooted in the hope that Hannibal will start speaking to him regularly again. Of course Will hopes it'll happen, but that's not the point. The point is that it hurts Hannibal and that he feels Will is unsatisfied with what they are now.

"You're enough," Will whispers. "You are *everything* , Hannibal. You're all I have left, and all I need, and I could die happy having heard you say my name just now. There's nothing I would not do to hear it every day, but I don't *need* it. You're enough. More than. I'm sorry that I don't always make you feel that way."

He kisses the back of Hannibal's neck, and hugs him tighter around the middle.

"I'm proud of you," Will whispers. "I know it's important to you to get your words back, but I know it's frustrating, too. You can take all the time you need, and I'll be proud of you no matter what. Whether you start reciting poetry to me tomorrow, or never speak to me again. I'm here. I'm not going anywhere."

Hannibal nods in acknowledgment, and places a hand over the one Will has on his stomach.

They lay there for a few more hours, Hannibal turning over a few minutes in to bury his face in Will's chest and wrap an arm around him. Their erections have been forgotten, and they don't try again, but Will doesn't mind. Just having Hannibal in his arms is enough.

In the early afternoon, the dogs push their way through the halfway closed bedroom door and jump into bed with them. They sniff excitedly at their faces and bare arms above the covers until Will slips out of bed and gets dressed. Hannibal stays where he is, still asleep. His eyes are screwed shut, and his breathing grows heavier the longer Will is out of bed, pulling on clothes.

Will is quick as he runs downstairs to put the dogs outside, and then bounds back up the stairs to find Hannibal thrashing in his sleep.

It's been a long time since Will has noticed him having a nightmare. He can't help but feel guilty about it, knowing that he could have some part in it, having made Hannibal upset this morning.

Before he can ever cross the room to try waking Hannibal, his husband shoots up in the bed, sitting upright with a crazed look on his face. He looks down at the empty spot beside him first, and then around the room until he spots Will still in the doorway. He immediately calms down, a deep relieved breath moving through him.

Will goes to him, and sits down beside him. He places a hand on his back and rubs up and down his spine until he slumps into Will's body.

"What do you need?" Will asks.

Hannibal presses his face into the crook of Will's neck and kisses him softly.

“Did you want your journal?” Will asks, kissing the top of Hannibal’s head.

He nods, so Will stretches out to grab it from Hannibal’s nightstand, along with one of the several pens set beside it. Will smiles at the pile, knowing they accumulate because Hannibal keeps them in his pockets, takes them out before bed, and then takes another from downstairs instead of remembering to take the one from the previous night.

When the journal is settled in Hannibal’s lap, Will makes a move to give him some privacy while he writes. Hannibal doesn’t let him get very far, a hand darting out to loop a finger through one of his belt loops and pull him back.

“Oh. Okay,” Will says. “Yeah, I can… I’ll stay. Do you want me to look away?”

Hannibal shakes his head, no, and begins to write. Will thinks about averting his eyes anyway, but he has a feeling Hannibal wants to tell him about this one. He rests his head against Hannibal’s shoulder as they sit against the headboard side by side. He looks down at the paper as Hannibal writes.

It has been two weeks since my last entry, Hannibal writes. *Today’s dream is both similar and dissimilar from the others. I found myself atop the cliff with Will again, just as I so often do. That moment where he embraced me and accepted me feels like a good dream. It was the best moment of my life up until that moment. My subconscious never allows me the satisfaction of seeing that moment untarnished. It always has to end poorly.*

This dream was similar in that respect.

Just as Will took my hand to be pulled off the ground, just as he was supposed to pull me close and hold me tight, he had a different idea. Instead of pulling me close and accepting me, Will planted his feet in the gravel and pushed me from the edge. As I fall I see his face alight with laughter. I wake before I hit the water.

Will kisses his neck, and takes the journal when Hannibal offers it to him. Hannibal doesn’t look at him, but Will doesn’t need him to. He knows that Hannibal is feeling vulnerable again without even looking at him.

“Falling dreams can symbolize feeling inadequate or out of control,” Will recites from a website he read one of their first nights in the house. “I wonder if you falling alone while I stand and watch is how you feel in your waking life?”

Hannibal shrugs, which Will takes as a resounding *yes.*

Will sighs.

“I know,” Will whispers. “I know you feel alone in this. I know you feel like I don’t understand, and I know I can’t fully, but… you know we’re both struggling with parts of ourselves we didn’t think we would struggle with.”

Hannibal doesn’t respond in any way when Will pauses. Will doesn’t try to look at his face, and decides to explain himself just a little bit better.

“You need control over everything, and your voice being taken from you takes away some control, I know that,” Will says. “I know you feel alone in that, and that it’s a battle for you.” He reaches out and grips Hannibal’s hand, settling them both on his knee over the blankets. “You know how alone I feel, too? Hannibal, I just realized I’m gay. At forty. And who do I have to talk to about that? Just you. And I already—I meant it when I said you could never talk to me again, but you were my therapist,” Will chuckles. “You feel alone, and so do I, and it’s not the same as it used to be, but there are so many parts of each other we understand better than we used to. We’re in this together. We’re both out of our elements, but we’re doing that together, right?”

Hannibal nods, and finally turns to look at him.

He looks exhausted, and Will nearly suggests they go back to sleep, but Hannibal gets out of bed before he can say anything.

Hannibal makes a gesture that indicates he wants Will to leave the room, and then he goes into the bathroom and shuts the door.

Will leaves the bedroom, going back downstairs to let the dogs back inside and feed them.

He begins making lunch for Hannibal and himself when something on the counter catches his eye.

The keys to the basement.

It’s then that Will remembers they have someone in their house that they’re planning to kill. And he remembers that Hannibal had given him the keys so he could call the shots going forward. Even if Will is out of his depth here.

He shakes his head. He doesn’t want it to be this way.

Hannibal comes downstairs after about twenty minutes and Will tosses the keys in his direction. Hannibal catches them midair and looks down at them, the question in his eyes when he looks back up.

“Our first kill since Dolarhyde,” Will says with a shrug. “You’re having some… insecurities about your lack of control, and I’m having insecurities over the fact that I have no fucking idea what I’m doing in more than one aspect of my life. I want you to take the reins on this.”

Will sets a plate down in front of Hannibal and one in front of his seat. On both, he’s put a pile of cut up fruit and a grilled cheese for each of them. Hannibal doesn’t even make a face about the lack of presentation or the simplicity of the meal before he stabs a piece of a strawberry with his fork.

“Besides,” Will adds. “This is out of my comfort zone. You may have to push my boundaries a bit with it. I’ll help, but you need to show me.”

Hannibal pockets the keys, and Will takes that as agreement.

They don’t do anything regarding the man in the basement until late in the afternoon.

When Hannibal finally gets up from where they lounge tangled on the couch with the dogs, he gestures for Will to stay.

He's gone for nearly an hour, and Will knows he's in the basement. He doesn't know why he's been told to stay where he is—he wants to participate in this kill—but he does it. He feels lazy today as it's his day off, so he doesn't mind the hour of alone time where he watches TV.

By the time Hannibal comes back up, Will is nearly asleep on the couch. He stirs when Hannibal settles onto the couch and lifts him to lay his head in his lap. Hannibal's hand settles in Will's hair, and massages his scalp until Will allows himself to drift off.

He has no more answers than he did before Hannibal went down there, but he's content to have a nap while Hannibal plays with his hair.

It's dark in the house when Will fully wakes. Hannibal's lap is no longer under his head, but a pillow instead. There's a blanket draped over his body, and the TV has been turned off. The dogs aren't with him, either.

He gets up, wrapping the blanket around his shoulders and moves through the dark house, listening for any noises, but he finds nothing. He goes upstairs first, having seen from the hall that the kitchen light is off.

Hannibal isn't upstairs, nor are the dogs. He looks out into the backyard from the bedroom window, but they aren't out there, either.

The only other place he could imagine Hannibal being is the basement, but he doesn't want to go down there if not invited down.

He texts Hannibal instead, asking where he is. He waits for a response.

He stands in the bedroom, looking at the items that have accumulated over the last few months. The house had seemed so bare when they arrived, but now it feels lived-in. It feels like theirs. Books are stacked on Hannibal's nightstand, both notebooks and literature. His pile of discarded pens are lined up side by side meticulously because even in his forgetfulness, he can't stand the clutter. His reading glasses, of which he has a pair for each room of the house that he reads in, sit on top of the pile of books. On Will's own nightstand is a box of condoms, and his new glasses that he rarely wears, but likes to have.

His laptop sits on his desk beside Hannibal's tablet and drawing supplies. One of his shirts is draped over the back of the chair, with one of Hannibal's ties draped over that. A few more clothing items are strewn across the room, but Will can't imagine Hannibal used to live this messily. There was never a single thing out of place in his old house, and though Will never saw his bedroom, he imagines it was no different.

Looking around this room, though, there's signs of Hannibal everywhere.

Signs of their life together.

Signs of home.

Hannibal doesn't have to pretend. He doesn't have to keep up any neat appearances if he doesn't want to—he can let some of the chaos inside him come free because he doesn't have to be Doctor Hannibal Lecter of Baltimore. Here, he just has to be Hannibal, or whatever endearment Will wants to call him.

He can be free.

Will's phone buzzes in his pocket as he looks at the framed photographs on top of Hannibal's dresser. Will hadn't noticed them before, but there's a picture of a young girl, no older than three years old, with light blonde hair and Hannibal's smile and eyes. Will reaches out and traces the bottom of the picture frame with one finger, a frown forming on his face. The other photo on the dresser is one of Will, lounging in a chair on the deck of their boat. He's shirtless, and the sun shines on all the skin not covered by bandages. There's a bandage on his cheek too. In the photo, Hannibal sits beside him, staring lovingly at him while Will stares off over the horizon.

He doesn't remember the photo being taken, but he imagines he was high as shit on painkillers, and that it was taken by Chiyoh. She must have had it printed for Hannibal when she brought the photo of Mischa.

His phone buzzes again, and that's when he remembers the first one.

Hannibal: *Out for a walk with our furry friends. They became restless. I will be home in an hour.*

Hannibal: *There is dinner in the fridge. Heating instructions on top of the container.*

Will takes one last look at the photographs on the dresser, and turns away. He lays the blanket from his shoulders on the bed and texts Hannibal back as he walks down the hall and downstairs.

Will: *You should have woken me up, and we could have gone together. We don't know how well Monster and Ripper do around other dogs yet, and it would have been easier if you didn't have to worry about holding onto all three dogs at once. I suppose if anyone can keep hold of all of their leashes, it's you, but I still worry. Please be safe and don't get caught. I love you.*

He hits send on the message as he walks into the kitchen and feels for the light switch.

Then he's tackled to the cold ground, barely missing his head on the hard tile.

For a brief moment he thinks it's Hannibal, and he's about to laugh. But the weight is dispersed all wrong. This tackle was meant to hurt him, not to be playful. He's laying face down, a knee in the small of his back, and one hand on his shoulder, the other on the back of his head. The hands aren't the right size or shape, and they're not the steady strength of Hannibal's.

“Bastard,” Will mutters, though it’s not directed at the man pinning him down. It’s directed at the man who let him wander free from their basement. Because if Will had a nickel for every person Hannibal set upon him, he’d have two nickels. Which isn’t actually very much, but the fact that it’s happened twice—well, that has Hannibal written all over it.

He’s only under the man for a few seconds, but that’s enough for him to believe he has the upper hand in this situation. Will can easily play the weak man that this guy sees him to be. He can play into the stereotypes he knows this guy places upon him. He even goes as far as to whimper, and calls out for Hannibal. Loud and desperate.

“Your husband is not here,” the man over him says with a thick, French accent. “It’s just you and me. And I’m going to kill you before you and your freak husband can do what you were going to do with me.”

“No, please!” Will screams, thrashing and pretending that he can’t wrench himself free from this hold. He knows he can—him and Hannibal have been working out together, and even if they hadn’t, they sometimes wrestle each other on the couch for the TV remote when Will wants to watch something and Hannibal doesn’t.

This man isn’t Hannibal. Nowhere near.

Will takes a blow to the side of his head, and bites back the groan—it hurt, but he won’t give him the satisfaction of making that known.

After the hit—while the man above him is off guard because he thinks he disoriented Will—Will rolls over, throwing the weight off of him, and jumping off the floor. He slides his hand under the edge of the counter, feeling for the scalpel he knows Hannibal has taped below it. He’s careful in his movements, pretending to cower and grip the counter for stability, rather than for a weapon. He finds it and carefully slides it into his sleeve as the man stalks toward him. He grabs a knife from the block, and Will lets out another scared noise.

The man before him is under the impression that Will is both unarmed and scared. That he’s weak and has to rely on Hannibal to do the heavy lifting. That is why he isn’t immediately stabbing Will. It’s why he’s smug and arrogant in a way that is embarrassing. While Hannibal would be smug and arrogant in a situation such as this, he wouldn’t be so stupid. He would take one look at someone like Will, and see the muscles that move under his shirt, and the lack of fear in his eyes, and he wouldn’t play this game if he couldn’t win it.

This man is not Hannibal.

Which is why Will disarms him in one swift movement, gets the man pinned with his back to Will’s chest in the next, and then drags the scalpel across his neck. One, two, three. Just like that. Blood sprays across the kitchen and Will curses under his breath.

It hits the wall and he has a flashback to Abigail.

Hannibal coming in through the kitchen doorway with the same look he had on his face in the Hobbs’ residence on that fateful day is enough to make Will drop the man in his arms and storm across the kitchen.

“You fucker!” Will growls at him. “Seriously, Hannibal? You call this having control over the situation?” He gestures at the blood covering the kitchen, and the man choking on his own blood just feet away. “I’m going to shower. Clean this up.”

Will pushes past him and up the stairs.

He locks himself in the bathroom and only then do his hands begin to shake. He lets out a cackling laugh, and sinks to the floor, sliding down the back of the door until he reaches the ground. He continues to laugh, his hands shaking where they rest on his thighs.

He just killed someone, and Hannibal set it up. Hannibal let loose the prisoner in their house while Will slept, and he hid—where did Hannibal even hide? Where are his dogs?—so that Will could kill him, and it shouldn’t be funny, but Will *laughs*. He rubs his hand over his face, realizing too late that he’s still covered in blood. He manages to drag himself away from the door and out of his clothes, then he gets into the shower and sits on the ground as the spray hits him.

A few minutes, or maybe many minutes, go by, and Will hears the click of the lock, and the knob turns. He’s joined by Hannibal in the shower just a minute later, his husband stepping in behind him. Will leans back against his shins and looks up through his wet bangs to see Hannibal above him, similarly covered in blood, just as Will had been.

“I know why you did it,” Will says, looking back down at his hands. He scrubs under his nails with a washcloth, but the blood isn’t coming out.

Hannibal kneels behind him and takes the cloth from him, lifting Will’s hand to slide his own nail under Will’s, effectively scraping the blood out. He nuzzles the top of Will’s head with his cheek, a request for Will to explain for him, but also an apology.

“You knew I wouldn’t find any sort of pleasure in tying him down and having him defenseless as we carve into him,” Will says. “You know I like to fight. And kill with my hands. I suppose I used a scalpel, but I felt the give of his skin, and the warmth of his blood, and the weight of him slumping against my chest.”

Will pauses and watches Hannibal pick more blood from under his nails. He sees Abigail in his head again, both the day in her own house, and the night in Hannibal’s. He sees her blood. He sees her choking. He hears her cries. He sees the light fade from her eyes. He sees Hannibal. Flickering between his faces on both of those days—his false concern which, Will now realizes, doubled as pride during the first… the utter betrayal and heartbreak and pain during the second.

“I killed him…” Will chokes out. He pushes through. “How you killed Abigail. How her father tried to kill her.”

They haven’t mentioned Abigail since the day they fought, fists and teeth and claws.

There’s no anger this time.

Just sadness. Just pure sadness, and a bit of regret.

His shoulders shake on a sob, and Hannibal's arms slide around his waist. He cradles Will's head against his chest with one hand, and keeps the other arm secured around his waist. He rocks him back and forth, letting Will cry for as long as he needs to.

They sit on the floor of the shower for a long time. The blood washing away beneath their bodies, swirling down the drain along with Will's tears, and the quiet shushing noises that Hannibal makes which get drowned out by the sound of the water.

Will cries for Abigail in a way he never allowed himself to do following her death because the time never seemed right and his grief never felt right when her death felt like his own fault. Hannibal holds him through it all. Here, he allows himself to feel what he bottled up for years. Here, in the safety of Hannibal's arms, he allows himself to think of the girl that changed the trajectory of his life. Who lived and died beside him on two different kitchen floors.

Hannibal eventually pulls him off the shower floor and helps dry him off. They crawl into bed beside each other, and Will immediately finds himself back in Hannibal's arms. The arms of Abigail's killer.

He can't bring himself to hate Hannibal for making him feel this way.

Not when Hannibal is truly all he has left.

He forgives Hannibal. He hopes Abigail can forgive him for that. He hopes he can be forgiven for forgiving Hannibal after everything. And not just Abigail, but Beverly, too. And for trying to have Molly and Walter killed, and for tipping Mason off to Margot's pregnancy, and for sending Tier after him, and putting him in prison, and letting his brain melt. After all of that, and everything else. Will wants to let go of the past. He needs to.

But there are several loose ends he needs to tie up before he can move on completely. He can forgive Hannibal all day, but he'll never be able to forget, and he will never forgive others involved. It's why he comes to the conclusion that he does.

When Will finishes crying, Hannibal slides out of bed and leaves the room. He comes back with a plate and a glass of water, watching Will drink it all down before he feeds Will from the plate of food.

Hannibal takes care of him, and Will doesn't ask about the body, or if they'll display it, and he doesn't ask about the meat, or if Hannibal cleaned up the kitchen. Instead, he lays himself half on top of Hannibal's naked body, and leaves wet kisses to his throat. Hannibal's hands find his hips, and urge him closer, pulling him so he's laid fully over Hannibal's body.

They rut against each other, both of them growing hard as their dicks rub against one another. Will continues to leave kisses against Hannibal's throat, grazing his teeth along the skin in a way that makes Hannibal gasp and buck his hips up against Will's.

Will reaches a hand between them and wraps it around both of their lengths as best as he can, both of them thrusting into it as they get closer and closer to their climaxes.

“I want to kill Bedelia next,” Will whispers into his ear. He bites down, then kisses the agitated skin and whispers, “Move up the date.”

Hannibal comes in his hand with a hard thrust, and then flips them to take Will’s cock into his mouth.

When they’re finished, and cleaned up, Hannibal lays with his head on Will’s chest and a hand over the scar on his stomach. Will feels a warm tear on his skin, and he knows Hannibal is crying—whether it’s because he’s thinking of that night in his kitchen, or just because he’s overwhelmed in a way he sometimes does where Will is involved, or because he knows he could have lost Will tonight, Will doesn’t know.

It’s his turn to hold Hannibal tight, now. He’ll do that no matter what, with no need for an explanation as to why Hannibal needs it.

He would give Hannibal anything, no questions asked.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

> Sorry this took so long! I hope the wait has been worth it. I'll try and get back to regular posting but this time of year makes me weird so we'll just have to see how it goes. Hopefully I'm normal by the new year. Just a few more chapters (3 or 4??? Not 100% sure) after this one. Let me know what you think! & Thank you to everyone who comments, kudo's, bookmarks ands recommends this fic! Please keep doing so <3

Days later, Hannibal presents Will with a new ring and a new plan. The ring is a simple band with sapphires inlaid to match Hannibal's own. Will pulls it carefully from the box and slides it onto his finger, noting that this one fits perfectly.

He kisses Hannibal on the forehead, and goes to grab the folder of information that was set off to the side, but Hannibal grabs his hand. He pulls the ring off with a gentle touch, much to Will's confusion.

Hannibal holds the ring in his hand, moving it, so he can look at the inside of the band, then turns it so Will can do the same.

'Time did reverse,' is engraved inside it, followed by a date. Will's first thought is the day Hannibal said those words to him—the day Hannibal gutted him and took Abigail away mere moments after giving her back. *Time did reverse,* Hannibal had said. *The teacup I shattered that I shattered has come back together. A place was made for Abigail in your world. Do you understand? A place was made for all of us, together.*

That may very well have been one of the worst days of Will's life. There had been proof that day of Abigail's demise, making it worse than the first time he had thought she was dead; the day he was arrested. Worse, even, than the day Hannibal had tried cutting open his skull, and only days later turned himself in.

The night in Hannibal's kitchen was worse than anything else—because Hannibal cut Will from his life, cut Abigail from the world, and *left.* Will didn't push him away, he didn't ask Hannibal to leave, he didn't want him to go. Not like the day Hannibal turned himself in.

Hannibal had left. Hannibal left Will where he was, and didn't make it easy to find him.

The thought of that day turns Will's body cold.

A hand settles over his own, slides down to grasp his wrist, as another arm comes around his shoulders and pulls him close, into the side of a warm body.

Will comes back to the present as lips press to his temple and the hand on his wrist comes up to his scarred cheek. Will hums in response and allows his face to be turned. Hannibal's lips press to his own, just a gentle caress, before pulling away. He rests his forehead against Will's, and Will, realizing he has begun to hyperventilate, uses Hannibal's calm breathing as a guide to calm himself down.

Long minutes pass where Will just breathes with Hannibal, the ring clutched tightly in his hand. Eventually Hannibal pulls back and opens Will's hand, to pull the ring out. He runs his finger along the date, and Will realizes it's much more recent—not the date of that dreadful night, but a new one. One that symbolizes time reversing yet again. A night that the teacup came back together, and a life was created for both of them.

"The… day we killed Dolarhyde?" Will asks.

Hannibal responds with a faint smile and a nod, then slides the ring back onto Will's finger. Will lets him kiss his knuckles, kiss over the ring, and then trail kisses all the way up his arm to his neck. He kisses several spots on Will's face until Will cracks a smile, unable to help himself. He knows Hannibal likely wants an explanation for the freak out—he needs to tell him that it was because of the memories those words carry, rather than the actual date inscribed in the ring. Instead, he just turns his face into Hannibal's neck and wraps his arms around his body.

They end up laying down, Will pressed into Hannibal's side on the couch. Hannibal brings up a hand to play with Will's curls, running his hands through the long locks—he should likely get a haircut soon, he knows, but he can't bring himself to go. He doesn't like the idea of other people being close enough to touch the scars on his face, and surely they will. He doesn't really like the idea of anyone except Hannibal touching him at all, if he's being honest.

Hannibal seems to like it long. Will tells himself that's not why he keeps it.

"It's different now," Will whispers. "Those words mean something different now."

Hannibal applies more pressure as he caresses Will's head as a way of acknowledging what Will is saying.

"Obviously I remembered the night you said that to me," Will starts. "But I think…" he trails off, gathering his thoughts. "Back then, you had made a place for Abigail and then took her away from me."

He doesn't say it maliciously or with any anger. A bit of sadness, perhaps, but after the night Will cried for her, he's come to a sort of acceptance for where they are now. That night, they made a place for Abigail in their lives again. They made a place where they're allowed to remember her and miss her. It's safe for Will to feel, now. Whether she's with them or not, she's still with them. Will thinks the words on the ring are a perfect way of commemorating the family they almost had.

He explains all of that to Hannibal, who continues to stroke Will's hair as he speaks. Will stays pressed close, barely speaking above a whisper into the crook of Hannibal's neck.

When Will finishes, Hannibal allows him to look at the folder beside him. He opens it, Hannibal sitting close beside him on the couch, an arm behind his shoulders, looking down at the words as Will reads them. Will flips through several photographs taken outside of restaurants and shops and several outside of a house, all time stamped and dated. It takes Will a few minutes to piece together the information he's taking in, slowly realizing that the names of the shops are not in English.

Bedelia is in Europe. Italy.

That, or she's somewhere in the United States with the exact shop names and architecture Will saw several years ago on his own trip to Italy to find Hannibal.

"Why would she…" Will trails off. He looks at the pictures more closely, sees that she's in no way hiding her identity when she leaves her home. She isn't fearful of what may lurk in the dark alleys beside her house. "She thinks we aren't stupid enough to be seen in Italy."

Hannibal nods, his chin resting on Will's shoulder now.

"But we're going to go, aren't we?" Will asks. He contemplates for a moment. "You've been keeping tabs on everyone else, right? What's the search for us like?"

Hannibal leaves the room without a word, but his pace indicates purpose, so Will knows he'll be back with an answer.

When he comes back, Hannibal is holding his tablet in his hands. He passes it to Will, who sees a headline reading that Jack has retired from his position.

"He wouldn't," Will whispers. "It has to be a trick, right? Something to make us feel more secure."

Hannibal settles down beside him on the couch, and switches to another tab.

A Tattlecrime article with a photo showing Jack at a recent crime scene. His scarf is covering most of his face, and he has a hood pulled up, but Will could recognize Jack's build anywhere.

"He's going to find a way to arrest Lounds," Will muses.

Hannibal smiles at him, and takes the tablet from his hands. He opens up the email app and scrolls until he finds the message he's looking for. In the attachments are several photos of Alana leaving the BSHCI.

"I would've expected her to go into hiding," Will comments as Hannibal swipes through them. "I think this is all very dangerous. Do you have a plan?"

Hannibal nods, and takes the tablet away. He removes the folder from Will's lap and sets everything down on the coffee table.

"Are you going to show me?" Will asks, raising an eyebrow.

Hannibal seems to consider it, then shakes his head. He places a hand on Will's thigh, instead. Very high.

"You have something else in mind, don't you?" Will whispers, leaning in so he can kiss Hannibal softly. "Well, c'mon then."

Will stands up and stretches his arms above his head, watching Hannibal's eyes dart to the exposed sliver of his stomach as his shirt rides up. Will tilts his head, seeing if Hannibal's going to stand, or not, then turns and runs from the room, up toward the bedroom.

Hannibal catches up to him very quickly, scooping him up and throwing him over his shoulder as he walks through the hallway.

Will gets thrown onto the bed, and then Hannibal is on him, kissing him with a hunger that Will matches easily.

It's not until hours later—after Hannibal has worshipped Will's body like it was a gift from god himself, after Hannibal held Will close as he slid in and out of Will's body, keeping them both on the edge of orgasm for as long as possible—that Hannibal finally shows Will his plan.

Will doesn't like it, but he decides to trust Hannibal.

During the next week, they begin to make arrangements. Will decides to close up the shop for the entire time they'll be gone, just in case they aren't able to come back for a long time. He makes sure all of his employees continue to get paid while they can't work, hoping that if anything happens to him, that they'll be okay until they can get new jobs.

The dogs are trickier. Will knows they can't come with, but they can't be left behind either. Chiyoh ends up taking them and promises they'll be safe for as long as Hannibal and Will are away. He doesn't ask any questions until three days later, when she returns with no dogs, saying she's going to be staying with them for the next few days, and will be accompanying them on their trip.

"Where are they?" Will asks after she stops talking.

"They're staying with a friend," Chiyoh tells him. "She will be sending daily updates to me."

Will accepts that, but wishes he had more information. He knows Winston is likely unhappy with this development. He probably thinks he's been abandoned again.

Hannibal seems to notice the fall in Will's attitude, and squeezes his shoulder, then kisses his temple.

"Next order of business," Chiyoh says, very matter of fact, with no room for nonsense. She points to Hannibal, but addresses Will. "This one hasn't spoken to me in quite some time. Only texts and emails. What did you do to him this time?"

Will's mouth falls open, and he looks over to Hannibal, who just shrugs.

“Progress isn’t linear,” Will offers, half questioning himself.

Hannibal nods, satisfied with that answer.

Will leans in to whisper into his ear. “Tell me about it later?”

Hannibal nods again, and turns so he can brush his lips against Will’s own. Barely a kiss, but definitely a promise.

They aren’t due to leave for another week, and in that time, Chiyoh spends a lot of it with a notebook in front of her while she talks on the phone. She speaks several different languages, seeming to switch it up on each phone call. There’s no way Will could keep up, or even guess what she’s saying, but Hannibal just keeps giving him reassuring squeezes.

It feels like everything is falling into place, but at the same time Will feels out of the loop on everything.

After two days of this, Will finds himself frustrated and restless. Hannibal distracts him with sex, vigorous work outs in the home gym, walks through the neighborhood, and laps in the pool. None of it really helps, but Will appreciates Hannibal trying.

He misses his dogs.

He can’t stop thinking about how Hannibal’s mutism has gone from selective, back to seemingly absolute. He can’t help but wonder if it’s because of what he said that morning when he was fucking Hannibal, even if Hannibal told him via a note that it’s unrelated. *Sometimes things like this happen,* Hannibal had written. *It’s no one’s fault, darling.*

By the time they all pile into Chiyoh’s car and begin their journey to Italy, Will has a terrible feeling about the plan. He didn’t like it when he first heard it, but now he feels as though he can’t even go along with it. He pretends he’s fine, and curls up beside Hannibal in the backseat.

He would pretend to sleep if he didn’t think Hannibal would know he’s faking.

They arrive at their hotel many hours later, and Chiyoh leaves them.

“I have other accommodations,” she explains after she gets them settled in their room. “Safer this way. I’ll be keeping an eye on both of you.”

As soon as she’s gone, Will throws himself at Hannibal. Hannibal stumbles backwards toward the bed, and allows himself to fall onto it with Will still clinging to him.

Hannibal seems to understand exactly what Will needs and begins rummaging through the bag he set down on the bed until he pulls out the lube and condoms.

“Can I ride you?” Will asks.

He grinds his hips forward, his cock hardening in his pants as he straddles Hannibal.

Hannibal nods, but still flips Will over onto the mattress and begins removing Will's clothes. When Will is naked, Hannibal turns him over to lay on his stomach and pushes a lubed finger inside him. Will groans and pushes back for more, working himself open on one of Hannibal's thick fingers.

He takes a lot of time opening Will up—more time than Will cares for, truly. He knows it's because Hannibal doesn't want to hurt him, which he appreciates, but Will is so restless and riled up, that he thinks it could very well kill him if Hannibal doesn't stick his cock in him soon.

Will rolls over when he's finally had enough, and tackles Hannibal to the bed. He reaches for the condom blindly, trying to kiss Hannibal's entire face as he moves his hips, rubbing their aching cocks together. By the time he rolls the condom onto Hannibal's cock and gets into position, he's completely untethered. His mind is going a million miles a minute and his body is screaming for any sort of stimulation and he feels like he's going to explode if he doesn't work out some of his anxious energy. He sinks down too fast, but he doesn't care. He starts moving before either of them are ready, but that doesn't matter either.

With his fingers digging into Hannibal's shoulders, he moves with a sense of urgency he's really never felt before. He can't believe it took him so long to get here.

He laughs, a loud cackle, feeling so much love for Hannibal. He needs more, more, more, but he doesn't know *what* he needs more of. More Hannibal is all he can think of being the answer to that, so he grabs Hannibal's hands and moves them to his own hips, squeezing so Hannibal gets the message to hold him there. *Tighter,* Will urges. When Hannibal's grip begins to hurt, Will moans, satisfied with the impending bruises on his skin.

"God!" Will groans, slamming down on Hannibal's cock. "Why didn't you tell me I was gay sooner?! I can't believe I've been missing out on good sex this entire time."

Hannibal flips them and starts thrusting into Will. He bends over him, kissing the scars on his shoulders, and pressing his teeth into the crook of his neck. Will cries out, his hand flying to the back of Hannibal's head to pull him in even more, urging his teeth to bite down harder.

By the time they're finished, and standing in the shower together, Will has barely relaxed. Hannibal runs soapy hands up and down his body and kisses the back of his neck. Will could easily go again if given just a few more minutes, but he knows they really don't have the time.

Hannibal has an itinerary written out, and made it perfectly clear to Will that they would only have a few hours in the hotel room before they are supposed to get dinner and then begin a stakeout.

"I'm all over the place," Will says, leaning back to rest against Hannibal's broad body. Hannibal's arms move to wrap around his chest, enveloping him and making him feel so small and secure. "Not sure how much use I'm going to be on the stakeout tonight. Might not be able to sit still."

Hannibal kisses the top of his head and squeezes him a bit tighter. Encouragement to explain himself.

Will hums in consideration. “I’m a bit nervous. I’m giddy. This is exciting! But I’m also terrified.” Will says in quick succession. “What happens if we’re caught? What if she sees us coming? What if she fights back? Something could go wrong, easily, but also… It could all go right, couldn’t it? It really could! That’s the exciting part. *God.* Sorry. I’m losing it a bit, aren’t I?”

Hannibal nods, rubbing his face in the back of Will’s hair.

Will laughs, and reaches out to shut off the shower.

“Right. Let’s get dinner then,” Will says, pulling Hannibal out of the shower by his hand.

After dinner, Hannibal and Will go their separate ways from the restaurant. They need to see if there’s law enforcement watching Bedelia’s house, and the two of them going together will be too conspicuous. Not only that, but they’ll be able to cover more ground by splitting up.

Will doesn’t like it, but he knows Hannibal won’t budge on it.

On his walk through the neighborhood, Will smiles brightly at neighbors and pretends he isn’t there for nefarious reasons. The kinder he looks, the more people will just assume he’s passing through, or visiting someone. If he looks shifty, then someone will call law enforcement on him.

He doesn’t see any of the typical signs of a police stakeout as he gets closer and closer to Bedelia’s house. He decides that’s either a very good sign, or a very bad one.

His phone buzzes in his pocket when he’s a block away from Bedelia’s house, and he takes it out to read the message.

Hannibal: *Bedelia has just left her house.*

Which means Chiyoh is likely breaking in already to check things out.

Sure enough, thirty seconds later, there are several photos in the groupchat, all sent from Chiyoh. They all show a different part of his first floor—windows and exit points, possible weapons, where the landline phone is, where the kitchen table is. As Will comes up to the house, more photos are sent of the upstairs—the bedroom, the bathrooms, the closet.

Just two doors down, the collar of Will’s shirt is grabbed and he’s yanked into a dark alleyway.

“Fuck!” Will yells. His stomach drops and his heart is pounding out of his chest as he’s pulled deeper into the alley. It’s too dark to really see, and he’s too paralyzed with fear to try and fight back.

He knows the arms that wrap around him from behind, he knows the chest that presses to his back, but the initial contact nearly made him piss himself in fear.

“I know you can’t speak, but holy fuck, warn a guy before you grab him, maybe?” Will hisses. He turns around and falls into Hannibal’s chest, allowing himself to be held, and his hair to be stroked. Hannibal kisses the top of his head in apology, and Will melts. “I’m okay. I’m good now.”

Hannibal holds him for a while longer, likely more for his own sake than for Will’s.

Chiyoh sends a message saying the house is clear, which they both read on their own phones, and Hannibal leaves the alley.

Will knows he’s supposed to go back to the hotel now, but he can’t help but watch as Hannibal crosses the street and lets himself into Bedelia’s house. He’s implanting audio recording devices in several rooms so they can hear if she’s speaking to anyone trying to catch them.

He really hopes she doesn’t come home before he’s done.

Chiyoh walks out the front door, shutting it behind her, and then spots Will and gestures for him to get lost.

He gets to the hotel and has nothing to do besides wait for Hannibal, so he does.

This goes on for a week—they wake up and leave the hotel separately, and go to watch Bedelia’s house to see if anyone other than her comes or goes. All day, every day.

Chiyoh, thankfully, takes the nights for them, and Hannibal packs meals which they eat together. Beyond meal times, they stay apart, hidden in their own spots, watching and waiting. Nothing really happens.

They always leave separately, Will an hour before Hannibal. They do that so Chiyoh can watch and make sure Will hasn’t been followed before she leaves to relieve Hannibal of his duties.

A week after they arrive, Will is completely alone in the watching of Bedelia’s house while Hannibal gathers all of the necessary supplies from several different locations—stealing from hospitals for the most part. He sends Will regular updates each time he leaves a place without being caught, as well as an extra one every hour or so. Will is still terrified that his husband won’t make it back to the hotel tonight, even with the updates and promises that he’s being safe.

Bedelia leaves around noon, stepping out of her house and locking the door behind her. When she turns, Will swears her eyes land on him from where he’s hidden in some bushes. He just hopes he’s imagining things.

He receives a text from Hannibal about an hour later, saying he can leave his post and head back to the hotel—they'll be making their move as soon as Hannibal gets back to Florence. Will thinks Hannibal’s in Rome now, but he can’t remember, and they decided not to give locations through text messages just in case their phones are compromised. Either way, wherever Hannibal is, Will knows there’s going to be several hours before Hannibal arrives.

On the way back to the hotel, he stops at a drugstore—they ran out of lube and condoms two days ago, and Will is feeling that restless, anxious, anticipatory feeling again, and he plans on getting Hannibal into bed the second he walks into the hotel room.

He walks back, a skip in his step. All their long weeks of planning have come down to tonight. All these years where Will has felt like Bedelia has taken something from him, where he has felt wronged by her, and jealous, and wanted to *do something* about all of that, will all come to an end by the time they go to sleep tonight. He couldn't be more excited. He can't wait to share this excitement with Hannibal before they go to Bedelia's—to show him how much he loves him, and to make him feel good for making this happen, and to remind Hannibal what he has, even if Bedelia tries to win him back over.

Will knows Hannibal will never go back to her, and will never replace Will for the rest of their lives (not only because he loves Will so much, but because if Hannibal ever did replace him, it would be the end of his life, as Will would kill him.), but he can't help the surge of jealousy that rises up inside him. It nearly makes him turn around and march right back to Bedelia's house, and wait for her return so he can stab her in the throat and watch her gurgle on her own blood.

Shaking his head and laughing to himself, he pushes the thought from his head, and continues his walk back to the hotel. He smiles and waves to several shop owners as he passes. He stops and smells some flowers, and buys a bouquet, deciding Hannibal deserves it. He picks up a bottle of wine from another shop after that, taking his time. A few more purchases later, and he's on the street their hotel is on.

He opens the door to the room with his keycard, and seconds later he's on the ground, his purchases forced from his hands and scattered across the floor around him, as his arms are wrenched behind his back. The hands aren't familiar, and the hands turn into knees and elbows and feet holding him down as he thrashes in their hold. There must be six people on him, cuffing him, searching his pockets. He hears a dog sniffing near his head and he screams, and screams, and screams. Screaming for help, screaming that they've made a mistake. Screaming that he isn't the man they're looking for.

No one helps him. Nobody lets him go. Nobody says a word to him as he's picked up and carried down to the lobby and out the doors. He sees Chiyoh just outside the doors, and fear flashes on her face. She scrambles for her phone, but he knows there's no way for her to help him immediately. She needs to call Hannibal. *Make sure Hannibal is safe! Get him far away!* Will wants to scream.

They throw him into the back of a truck, strap him down in several places, and stick a needle attached to an IV bag into his arm. His voice has gone hoarse from the screaming, and his mind is beginning to go fuzzy around the edges as the truck begins to move.

And then there's nothing else.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

> Surprise perspective at the start of this chapter! Also this one's out early :) Thanks for commenting and leaving kudos.

Hannibal's phone starts ringing as he's driving. He thinks about ignoring it—it's not as if he's been able to speak to anyone the last few days, anyway—but Chiyoh's contact lighting up the screen raises alarms inside him. He presses the answer button on the steering wheel, allowing the call to be picked up by the car's bluetooth.

He doesn't greet her, just allows her to begin speaking.

"They got him. Someone—I didn't see them go into the hotel and I was there all day, but I saw them carrying him out," she says, rapidly spitting words into the phone.

Hannibal's stomach drops.

"Who?" he asks, forcing the word out because he needs to hear the answer. He needs to know what she's saying or else he will deny it and deny it, saying it's not true.

"Will. He's been arrested," Chiyoh answers. He can hear her breathing through the phone, harsh and ragged as if she's running. Maybe she is. Likely trying to get to the motorcycle she insisted on renting in case anything went wrong while Hannibal had the car. "Don't come back to Florence. I'm getting on the motorbike and following them. Lay low somewhere until I have answers."

"I—" Hannibal forces himself to say. He can't get the rest of the words out.

"They sounded American, but I can't be sure," Chiyoh tells him. "Could the FBI have sent people?"

Hannibal lets out a strangled sound, unable to answer through his anguish. He pulls over onto the side of the road and opens the car door. He needs air, he needs to get out, he needs to find Will and bring him home and never separate again.

He *knew* it was too soon to go after Bedelia. He *knew* they were underprepared. He wanted to wait, wanted to wait until she was back in America and they had more options for safe houses and knew how the FBI operated, but they didn't wait. And now Will's been taken, and it could be by anyone—it could be the FBI, it could be the Vergers, it could be someone else entirely, hired by Bedelia, it could be Italian police covering their accents. He doesn't *know.*

"Hannibal? I'm hanging up now. Don't do anything stupid."

With that, she hangs up, not waiting for an answer. She knows he'll do whatever he wants.

*

When Will comes to, his entire body goes cold. The sterile smell, the lighting, the hard cot under his back. He knows exactly where he is, and he knows that he might not be getting out this time. He stands from the cot and turns around, taking in Hannibal's old cell at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

There are five doors between him and the outside, and he knows none of them will be unlocked any time soon, unless to bring him the required meals, or to interrogate him. Even then, he won't be able to get out on his own.

For an entire week, no one that he knows comes to see him. Not Jack, not Alana, and certainly not Hannibal or Chiyoh. For that week, he sits in the spacious room and refuses meals, only eating one of them a day, he doesn't speak to anyone that does come to see him, to check on him, and assess his mental stability.

For a week, he waits, watching the door through the glass, expecting Hannibal to burst through guns blazing, and get him out.

He doesn't come.

Will keeps waiting.

On that eighth day, he paces his cell, back and forth in front of the glass wall. Back and forth, back and forth. His legs burn from the constant brisk walk, and the lack of nutrition, but he keeps on going, and going, back and forth. He reminds himself of the big cats he saw at a shitty zoo when he was a kid. Nowhere to go, nowhere to run, only glass to pace in front of for hours on end.

The door opens, and Will looks up, but doesn't falter.

"Nice of you to show up," he mutters. "Thought you'd be on me the second I got here."

"I had other matters to attend to," Alana says. She says it softly, kind, as if they're still friends, still coworkers. As if he didn't run away with the man who has threatened to kill her and her family, as if he isn't locked in her asylum for it.

Will just nods at her, and stops pacing. He crosses his arms in front of him, and stares her down. She looks the same as the last time he saw her—bright red lipstick, and a black pantsuit. She means no nonsense, and her appearance reflects that.

"Well," Will sighs. "Have at it. What do you want to know?"

"Oh, I'm not here to interrogate you," Alana answers. "I came to tell you your lawyer called and will be here soon."

Lawyer? He hopes that means Hannibal knows where he is.

“Jack is coming tomorrow,” Alana says next.

“Right,” Will mutters.

Alana steps closer to the glass, so Will does too, until they’re nearly pressed against it.

“If he comes for you, and I know he will, I won’t stop him,” Alana whispers. “Just please—in exchange for that, please make sure my family is safe.”

“I don’t know who you’re talking about,” Will lies.

“Okay,” Alana says. “But if you did, it would stay between us, and should likely be passed onto your lawyer.”

A pair of guards come through the door on the side of the cell, and Will allows them to cuff him. They fix one of the plastic masks to his face, tightening it a bit too harshly. As crazy as it sounds, Will misses Matthew Brown at this moment. He at least made sure Will’s hair didn’t get caught in the buckle.

“You’ll be in one of the privacy rooms. I won’t be able to hear anything you say,” Alana promises him.

He’s pushed from the room and down a hallway. He’s shoved into a small room and shackled to the table in there, then left alone.

Several minutes later, the door creaks open, and Will sits up a bit straighter, ready to greet and thank the lawyer for showing up. When he sees who it is, he slumps again, back to his casual demeanor.

“How’d you get in here?” Will asks.

Chiyoh takes the seat across from him, disguised in a way that only someone who knows her would really recognize. Her hair is cut into a short bob and dyed an unnatural deep red. He thinks it suits her. She wears thick framed glasses, and her makeup changes her facial features just slightly, but Will recognizes her perfect posture and the firm set of her jaw anywhere. No nonsense, much like Alana.

“The only person who would recognize me is Jack Crawford and he’s not here,” Chiyoh answers.

She reaches into her bag and pulls out some folders full of files.

“Alana said she won’t stop him,” Will whispers, leaning forward. “As long as he promises not to hurt her or her family.”

“I think that can be arranged,” Chiyoh says with an incline of her head. She opens the folders. “Jack Crawford is going to meet with you tomorrow. You need to deny knowing where Hannibal is.”

“He’s okay, right?” Will asks.

Chiyoh's face softens and she gives Will a sad smile. "He misses you."

"Well, tell him I miss him too, will you?"

"Of course. But you'll see him soon enough," Chiyoh whispers. She looks down at the papers in front of her, then slides them across the table. "Here's what they know. Anything else is just speculation."

Will reads down the list of items taken from him. One wedding ring; one wallet containing three credit cards, four hundred euros, and three fake IDs; one leatherman multitool; a spool of fishing line; a set of keys; and a cellphone. Then there's the list of his clothes, along with a list of all of his identifying scars, his height, weight, and history of violence.

He sets that page aside to see photos of their hotel room, and everything Will purchased the day he was arrested. Photos of the bed and the bathroom. Notes on a page underneath.

- *No usable DNA found — hotel room swiped completely clean, no full fingerprints, no traces of blood or semen*
- Hotel garbage currently being picked through — some items are promising, but need testing to be sure.
- Clothes found for the height and build consistent with Hannibal Lecter, and Will Graham, both — inadmissible as Lecter is average height/build but will be tested for DNA traces
- Items purchased: bouquet of flowers; condoms and personal lubricant; one bottle of wine; an assortment of fruit; two boxes of chocolates; a block of cheese; a loaf of fresh bread; several small handmade animal figurines. Shop owners will be questioned on whether they've seen Graham and Lecter together.
- No toiletries found in bathroom
- Cell phone can't be accessed without passcode

"Okay, so for all they know I've been with someone else," Will says when he finishes reading. "Right? Nothing forensic points to Hannibal just yet. We did switch rooms the evening before, and made sure the housekeepers were paid extra, but…"

"But if they find condoms in the hotel garbage, they will test them," Chiyoh says. "It's a good thing Hannibal had the foresight to take your toiletries with him, and all your worn clothes were in my room since I was going to do laundry. All they would need is your toothbrushes or a pair of worn underwear and you'd already be sentenced in a maximum security prison we wouldn't be able to infiltrate seeing as you aren't insane."

"Why'd they bring me here, anyway?" Will asks.

“Maximum amount of security they could get on short notice. We think Crawford is the one that sent them after you on his own. I think since he knows Alana so well, it was easier for this to all fly under the radar,” Chiyoh answers. “No one knows you’ve been arrested, Will. I had to make calls all over the place.”

“How did you find me?” Will asks.

“Freddie Lounds got a picture of them bringing you in,” Chiyoh says. “She hasn’t put it anywhere yet, but Hannibal suggested I call her, and it was the right choice.”

“What’s the plan? Alana said she won’t stop him, so why can’t we just walk out of here right now?”

Chiyoh shakes her head. “He isn’t ready yet. He wants to get you out himself.”

“Has he been talking?” Will asks.

“No,” Chiyoh answers. “Almost two words when I called him while they were arresting you, and nothing since. He’s… not doing well, I don’t think.”

“Where is he?” Will asks.

“In a safe house a few hours away,” Chiyoh says. “I’m staying here in Baltimore now, but I just left him this morning. His nightmares are back, and he isn’t really eating.”

“How did they get me, anyway?” Will asks.

“Bedelia saw you that day. She had her suspicions the entire time, apparently,” Chiyoh answers. “She only saw you on that one day, and you were followed.”

“How’d you guys get here?”

“Chartered a plane,” Chiyoh tells him. She pauses, as if she’s considering whether or not she wants to tell Will something else. She sighs, seemingly deciding to do so. “He has Bedelia.”

“Of course he does,” Will groans, head falling forward.

“I told him not to do anything stupid, and well, you know him,” Chiyoh says with a sigh. “He went after her and brought her back to the house in France. I don’t think we’re going to be able to go back there.”

Will sighs. “I liked that house.”

“I packed everything up while he made arrangements, and it’s all safe. We brought your dogs. They’re with Molly.”

“Is that… she won’t say anything?”

“I don’t think so. She likes me. She misses you,” Chiyoh shrugs. “I didn’t know where else to take them.”

Will nods a few times.

Chiyoh takes out her phone, then. She scrolls and clicks on something, then passes it across the table. Will looks down and sees that she dialed Hannibal. Will wants to cry suddenly. He holds the phone in one hand and has to lower his head to press his ear against it, the shackles keeping him in place.

Hannibal picks up, but doesn't say anything as an answer.

"Hi, baby," Will whispers into the phone. He hears the hitch of Hannibal's breath, and smiles. "I'm okay. I'm alright, okay? You're gonna get me out of here, yeah? Alana won't stop you as long as you promise not to hurt her family, okay? Can you do that? Just, you don't have to say it, but I know you'll make the right choice."

"Promise," Hannibal murmurs. It's so quiet, but Will hears it anyway. Just a breath of a word that means so much.

Will nearly sobs. "Okay. Good. I love you. I love you so much, Hannibal. Just don't do anything stupid."

Hannibal hums in response, not saying another word, but Will doesn't care. He really doesn't mind. It feels good to just know he's on the other end, that he's breathing right into Will's ear.

"We're going to be okay," Will promises.

"L-love you," Hannibal stutters.

Will loses it, tears streaming down his face as he sobs into the phone. He chokes out, "I love you, too," and continues to cry for another five minutes, Hannibal still on the line. It's the first time Hannibal has said it out loud to him, not counting the time Will thinks he heard it while he was falling asleep. He can't hold in the happiness he feels. Complete elation.

Hearing those words is like nothing else Will has ever experienced. He could die happy.

Chiyoh reaches a hand across the table and sets it over one of Will's, an apologetic look on her face.

"We're out of time," she tells him.

Will nods and wipes his face. He whispers goodbye and ends the call. Chiyoh slides the phone back into her pocket just in time for the door to the room to open, and the guards come in. Will hears the buzz of her phone as he's being pulled out of the room, and looks back to see her checking it.

"Make sure you eat something," Chiyoh calls out after him.

He knows the request is from Hannibal, so he nods at her as he's dragged out.

Jack doesn't actually come in the next day, or the day after. It takes four days, in fact, for Jack to finally show up, and Will is pacing his cell again when he does.

"You look…" Jack starts when he walks in. "You actually look good, Will. Healthy."

"Won't be for long if I'm kept here," Will grumbles. He stops pacing, and walks closer to the glass. "You look exhausted."

Jack ignores that and paces a few steps, then back. "We found your address, Will."

"What address would that be, Jack?" Will asks.

"The house on your identification," Jack answers, pulling Will's wallet out of his own pocket.

Will already knows there's several forms of identification—it was all on the report he read with Chiyoh—all with different names, and birth dates, and addresses. Each one of them matches the name on a credit card also in the same wallet. He knows that Jack would need to check every one of them, and still wouldn't find the house they've actually been living in. He doesn't say as much.

Jack opens the wallet and pulls out a single driver's license, and Will cranes his head to see it as best as he can as Jack looks down at it. He sees they're all different from the ones he had in there before. It would make sense, Will supposes. His other identities are nearly airtight, so it would do no good to risk them being compromised, and the debit cards are connected to Hannibal's main bank accounts. Will knows he has other smaller ones that he would be willing to part with—he assumes that's what the new cards are linked to. He had no idea they were different though, and wonders when Hannibal even had the time, and where his other stuff is.

"England, huh?" Jack muses. "Neighbors confirmed they saw two men with your descriptions come and go often for several months. Of course, the house was wiped clean of prints, as if no one was ever there. Except for several of your hairs stuck in the shower drain."

Will has no idea how Hannibal pulled all of that off, but he assumes that's something Chiyoh was doing during her many absences from their lives the last few months. He allows Jack the false victory.

"Shit," Will mutters. "You got me, Jack."

"You've been in the UK this entire time?" Jack asks.

Will shrugs, and walks back to sit behind the desk in the cell. He wants to prop his feet up, but without a back on his stool, it would take too much effort to keep himself upright. Instead, he sighs, and rests his elbow on the desk surface, and rests his chin on his hand.

Jack digs into his pocket and pulls something else out. It's small. Will glances down to his left hand, and notices the absence of his ring. Just a ring of skin lighter than the rest.

“You want this back, I would assume,” Jack says. He walks over and places it in the box set into the glass wall. He shuts the drawer again, and Will walks over, and opens it on his side. He removes the ring and looks it over.

He knows the inscription on the inside would be a dead giveaway, considering Jack was just on the other side of the pantry door when Hannibal said those words to him, and considering the day they both went missing is likely ingrained in Jack’s mind as one of his biggest failures, but when he checks it this time, the ring is completely different. It’s not his ring. It’s the same band with the same sapphires inlaid, but it’s not his ring.

From the outside, it looks the same, but the inside is all wrong. No inscription.

Maybe another thing Hannibal switched up on him.

Maybe he knew Will would be caught. Maybe he was just paranoid, and had no idea. For a single agonizing second, Will considers that Hannibal planned all of this all along but—but no. He would never stoop that low. Send killers after Will, maybe, but only because he knows Will can hold his own against a single man. Send the police after him? Hannibal would never. Not when he knows how bad it hurts to be on the receiving end of that treatment. Will feels a painful pang of regret through his entire body at the memory.

“Where is Hannibal Lecter?” Jack asks.

“I don’t know,” Will answers.

He slides the ring onto his finger, and it feels all wrong now that he knows it’s not *his.*

“Dr Du Maurier is missing which means you had an accomplice. I don’t know who else you would work with against her,” Jack says.

“I haven’t seen him in months,” Will says, pointedly not saying anything about Bedelia. “He patched me up, and he left me as soon as I was stable.”

“If you didn’t go with him, then why didn’t you come back to us?” Jack asks.

“Because I wanted to be *done,* Jack!” Will yells. “And I still somehow ended up right back here. How?”

“Bedelia du Maurier saw you lurking outside her house. She alerted authorities who watched you as you purchased flowers, wine, chocolates… condoms and lubricant, as well,” Jack says. “Who were you using those with?”

“Isn’t it just a good idea to have a stock of both?” Will asks. “Why does it automatically mean I was using them? Why would you think I’m using them with *Hannibal?* Couldn’t I have had a date that wasn’t him? Why would I buy Hannibal Lecter *flowers?”*

“Doctor du Maurier told me Hannibal Lecter is in love with you,” Jack says. “And years ago you told me you always wanted to run away with him.”

“Well, I changed my mind,” Will huffs. “And I’m not even gay, Jack.”

“Why are you lying for him?” Jack asks, ignoring Will’s insistence. “After everything he’s done to you and the rest of us, how can you go to him? How can you live with him and sleep with him, and wear his ring? What about Abigail, and Beverly, and his other victims? Don’t they mean anything to you?”

“I’m not fucking gay, Jack!” Will yells. Even trying his hardest, Will knows the lie is weak. Even with his aggressive insistence, he’s on the verge of tears over the fact that he’s denying both himself and his love for Hannibal at this moment. “I’m not sleeping with him, I’m not wearing his ring, I’m not living with him. He’s *nothing* more to me than the bastard that tried to kill me, okay?!”

After so much time denying it, Will thought it would be easy to do it again. Him and Hannibal only began their romantic relationship a few months ago, and that was after *years* of saying he was straight. So why does it hurt so bad to say it now?

Tears are streaming down his face, and he silently apologizes to Hannibal over and over and over in his head, knowing he won’t ever forgive himself for what he just said.

Whatever Jack is about to say next is cut short by the sound of several gunshots somewhere in the building. Jack draws his own gun just as the door behind him swings open. He points it at the intruder, but pauses.

Hannibal walks in through the door with Alana in front of him, one arm secured around her neck, using her body as a human shield.

“Now, Doctor Lecter,” Jack says. “It doesn’t need to be this way. We can talk. We can negotiate the terms of your imprisonment.”

Will stands there, awestruck at the sight of his husband. Furious, as well. How dare he go against his promise to Alana for this? Will wants to throttle him until he sees Alana’s face. She winks at him, and Will relaxes.

More gunshots sound in the hallway outside, and the door opens again, one last bullet soaring through the room with a precision that rivals anyone’s at the FBI. Blood splatters against the glass outside of Will’s cell and Jack flies backwards, slamming into the glass as he falls.

The bullet went through his shoulder, and Jack screams out in pain just as another hits the other shoulder. He won’t be able to lift his gun, Will notices.

He watches this all happening, and when no more guards come to figure out the commotion, Will wonders if they’re all dead. Surely not, right?

Hannibal nicks the keys out of Alana’s pocket and leaves through the visitors’ door to unlock the door on the side of the cell.

As soon as the door opens, Will is in his arms.

“Hannibal,” Will breathes, arms tight around his neck. He kisses his cheek, his temple, his nose.

Hannibal laughs quietly and squeezes his waist even tighter, kissing Will firmly on the mouth. He pulls back and tosses his head toward the hallway, and Will comes back to the present situation.

Chiyoh has Alana cuffed, pulling her down the hall by her arm. She has her gun strapped to her body, ready to shoot at a moment's notice.

Hannibal has one hand laced with one of Will's and they all take off at a run. There are alarms sounding in the building now and Will knows there isn't much time. He stumbles, tripping over his cheap prison shoes as he tries to keep up with Hannibal's gait.

"Jesus Hannibal," Will hisses. Hannibal doesn't slow down, but he tightens his grip on Will's hand, forcing him to keep up.

They come to a door and Hannibal swipes a keycard, another hallway, then another door. More sirens, and shouts. More gunshots.

Will runs on autopilot, focusing on nothing but Hannibal's hand in his own and the back of his head as he follows him. It feels like they run and run for miles inside the hospital, and then they're running outside, running and running, and Will can't breathe, but he keeps going. Keeps following Hannibal. He never lets go.

Not even when Hannibal shoves him into the backseat of a car. He doesn't let go.

"Sorry," Will hears Chiyoh saying outside, and then the trunk opens and shuts, and Chiyoh is in the driver's seat but Alana is nowhere to be found.

"Okay!" Will shouts, squeezing Hannibal's hand tight as Chiyoh pulls out of the hiding spot and onto a road. "Why the fuck is Alana in the trunk!? You promised!"

"Crawford wasn't supposed to be there today," Chiyoh says dryly. As if that answers the whole question. As if it even matters, seeing as he was taken care of. If he was such an issue, surely Chiyoh would have killed him instead of just immobilizing him.

"But Alana?" Will asks again.

Hannibal scoots across the backseat and pulls Will into his lap, wrapping an arm around his waist. He kisses his neck and his face, and digs his fingers in Will's hair. Touching everywhere. Will barely registers Chiyoh's explanation, and she seems to notice Will's distraction because she stops speaking midway through with a loud huff of breath.

"Will," Hannibal whispers, like it's the only word in the world, like it's the most important thing he could say. To Will, it is. It's everything. He wants to start crying all over again. The single word—Will's name—is a declaration of love, it's an apology, it's a prayer and a plea. It's everything Hannibal needs to say and Will understands it all. Hannibal's face is full of relief, and full of love, open and letting his emotions pour out, and Will's heart clenches. He's the only person in the world that can pull that out of him.

Will does start crying in the backseat of the old, beat up (most likely stolen) car, clutching Hannibal's shirt and shaking in his lap. The smell of stale cigarettes and old fast food lingers in the air, and it drives like it doesn't want to make it to its destination, but Hannibal is with him, and holding him safe, and they could be anywhere on the planet together, and it wouldn't matter so long as they're together.

"I'm sorry," Will whispers. "We are never going to be separated again, or I'll kill everyone that stands between us. You have my word, Hannibal."

Hannibal nuzzles his cheek and kisses him again. He forgives Will, just as Will forgives him for being completely stupid the last two weeks.

A jacket is placed over his shoulders as Will breathes into Hannibal's neck, his face buried. He doesn't even realize how cold he is in just his jumpsuit until the jacket is over him. He presses further into Hannibal's warmth and pulls the jacket—one of Hannibal's—tighter around himself. He feels like he can't get close enough.

Eventually he falls asleep, comforted by the soothing hands moving up and down his back.

When he comes to, they're still in the car, trees passing them by as they wind down a deserted backroad. He checks the clock on the dash, and knows it's only been an hour, but he doesn't know where they are, or how much further they need to go. Somehow he's ended up horizontal across the backseat, no longer sitting in Hannibal's lap, just his head resting on one thigh, and he feels bereft at the lack of contact between them.

Hannibal notices he's awake and reaches into the front seat to retrieve a bottle of water, and a bag of chips. He hands them to Will, who accepts them gratefully before sitting up and settling into Hannibal's side again.

"We're going to be safe, right?" Will asks Hannibal. He takes several sips of water. "We're going somewhere no one will find us?"

Hannibal nods, and even though Will swears he hears sirens in the distance, he believes him wholeheartedly. Even with Alana in their trunk, and Hannibal's promise seemingly broken, Will believes no harm will come to them. Even though the escape seems too easy—too good to be true—Will feels completely invincible with Hannibal back in his arms.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

> Desperately trying to end this story without making it feel too rushed. I am, unfortunately, just not feeling it anymore, but I won't leave it hanging because we're sooo close to the end. Just a couple left after this. Let me know what you think.

It's another four hours before they finally stop. Chiyoh pulls into the garage of a large house and kills the engine. Will is slow to disentangle himself from Hannibal's warmth. He doesn't want a moment without their bodies pressed together, making up for the loneliness the both of them felt over the last two weeks.

When Will finally slides out of the car and onto solid ground again, he sees Alana getting out of the trunk and brushing herself off, her hands no longer cuffed.

"Remind me to never get kidnapped for real," she mutters.

"Can someone—" Will starts.

"Looking like I was taken was the only way to make it believable that I didn't help you escape," Alana explains. "If I got out unscathed while everyone else was dead or incapacitated then it would have looked bad."

"So—"

"So Hannibal hasn't broken any promises," Chiyoh tells him. "I told you in the car and you didn't listen."

Hannibal begins tugging on the hand in his grasp, urging Will toward the house. They pass through a mudroom and into a kitchen. It's not unlike the kitchen in Hannibal's old house in Baltimore—same appliances, same clean, morgue-like appearance. Hannibal stops and turns, Chiyoh and Alana standing in the doorway.

He signs something to Chiyoh, who nods.

That's all that is necessary, apparently, because Hannibal begins pulling Will through the house again and up the stairs.

He hears Alana say, "What's wrong with Hannibal?" but doesn't hear Chiyoh's response because Hannibal pulls him just a little bit faster.

They come to a door that opens to the master bedroom. It's not dissimilar to their bedroom at home, and Will's grateful for the familiarity. It's clear Hannibal's been staying here for a few

days and it's apparent they he hasn't been doing well without Will—the room is a mess compared to Hannibal's normal standards.

"So what's the plan here?" Will asks. He yawns, exhausted after feeling like he couldn't relax for two weeks straight. Now, he knows he can.

Hannibal moves over to his side of the bed and picks up the journal sitting there. He flips to a page and begins writing things down while Will stands on the other side of the bed.

When he hands it over, Will reads it quickly.

We will both change into pajamas and rest for a few hours. I've missed you so, and would like to have you in my arms for as long as I can. Then, we will relocate tomorrow. I have Bedelia, as you know, and she's currently in our basement. We will take her up to another safe house I have in Maine where we will kill her, collect your dogs from your ex-wife's and then we will leave the country through Canada and fly to another safe house in an agreed upon location. All assuming we don't need to change our plans due to unforeseen factors. It will be dangerous and difficult, but I am optimistic.

"All that sounds fine to me," Will says, yawning again. "Pajamas?"

Hannibal smiles and goes over to the closet to retrieve them. Will slips out of the prison jumpsuit and tosses it to the corner of the room, then pulls on a pair of the high quality boxer briefs Hannibal has gotten him so used to in their time together.

"You know," Will says as he pulls a sweater over his head. "No one ever read me my Miranda's rights or told me what my charges even were, or if I'd get a trial. Was I even officially arrested? Or was this more like a kidnapping situation?"

Hannibal shrugs and climbs into the bed.

"I guess I should've asked Jack," Will shrugs and slides in beside him. Hannibal wraps his arms around Will's waist and pulls him impossibly tight to his own body.

Hannibal kisses the top of his head, and breathes in deeply. He squeezes a little bit tighter and Will does the same to him.

"There's nothing wrong with you," Will whispers after a few minutes. "I heard Alana. There's nothing *wrong* with you. I know I haven't been the most understanding about all of this the last few months. I've made a lot of it about me when I should have recognized that you're struggling too. I've said hurtful things, and I just want you to know that… it doesn't matter, okay? You not being able to speak isn't something *wrong* with you. It's not something broken that needs to be fixed. It's just a circumstance that I didn't react to very well, and I'm sorry."

Hannibal shakes his head against the top of Will's. *You have nothing to apologize for,* is the only way Will can interpret that headshake.

“Yeah, Hannibal, I *am* sorry,” Will repeats. “You’ve been nothing but patient with me. You’ve given me no real reason since the cliff to be so… so *cruel.* Choosing to come with you should’ve been me putting everything *before* behind me, and I didn’t. I jerked you around and I was a total bitch. I’ve been a total bitch, and you still broke me out of prison and you still want me, and sometimes I feel like I don’t deserve all of this patience and kindness. I feel like I don’t deserve your love.”

Hannibal places his hand over Will’s mouth, shutting him up for the time being. Will supposes that’s alright. He said what he wanted to say and, whether Hannibal agrees with him or not, it’s out there for him to think about.

They end up falling asleep together, and it’s the first restful sleep he’s had in nearly two weeks.

*

Jack wakes up in the hospital, numb from painkillers and not quite understanding why he is where he is. His head lolls to one side, and he sees the sleeping forms of Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller across the room. Their heads rest together, sitting up on the uncomfortable couch along the wall. In Brian’s grip is a file, EVIDENCE slapped across the front of it.

He clears his throat, dry and painful. He wants to reach for the pitcher of water beside his bed, but finds he can’t move his arms at all, both of them immobilized by bandages and slings.

It comes back to him in a haze—seeing Hannibal Lecter again, being shot by that woman, falling to the ground. Seeing through the glass to the other side of Will’s cell as he threw himself into Hannibal’s arms as soon as the door was opened.

Not gay, my ass, Jack thinks.

“Z,” Jack says. When he doesn’t move at all, he tries again, calling out, “Zeller!”

Both men jerk awake, turning to look around the room, then at each other, then at Jack.

“What’ve you got for me?” Jack asks, his voice hoarse.

Jimmy gets up and pours Jack a glass of water, holding it out with a straw for Jack to drink. It takes a minute longer for Zeller to get up from where he’s sitting, shuffling over with the file in hand.

Both agents pull up chairs beside Jack’s bed, and lay the folder open on the tray in front of him.

Inside are several crumpled pieces of paper laid flat in evidence bags, as well as lists and photos of other evidence.

“Found in the hotel garbage, sent to Quantico for testing. Both Lecter and Graham’s prints on the papers,” Zeller says. “They’re all in Lecter’s handwriting, though.”

Jack hugs in response as he reads through them. They're all mundane notes, saying everyday things. Not even love letters, just normal stuff like, "What's on TV?" or "Should we go out for dinner?"

"Why would Lecter be writing Will notes like this?" Jack asks.

"Maybe they were worried about being heard? They easily could have been recognized," Jimmy suggests.

"But then wouldn't Will have written notes back? And besides, they were seen every day leaving the hotel," Zeller responds. "There were some interviews with the hotel staff. Apparently Lecter didn't speak a single word to any of them."

"So, what? Hannibal Lecter, who has never shut up for a day in his life, isn't speaking to anyone? Something isn't right there," Jack says, shaking his head. "What else do we have?"

"Condoms were tested and results came back with only Lecter's semen inside them," Jimmy says.

"Okay?" Jack questions.

"So either Will *really* enjoys bottoming, Lecter likes it bare, or…" Jimmy trails off, but Jack gives him a pointed look, making him continue. "Could Lecter have been forcing him?"

"The Chesapeake Ripper's crimes were never sexual," Jack reminds him. "And I saw Will quite literally leap into his arms between me being shot and getting my phone out to call an ambulance."

"Stockholm Syndrome?" Zeller asks.

"Look," Jack sighs. "I know you guys want to believe Will wouldn't… I mean he was close to all of us, but the fact of the matter is that he's been in love with Hannibal Lecter for years. That's something we have to live with and accept."

Another loud sigh and Jack wishes he didn't have to be doing this, but he knows it's his job whether he's been shot in both shoulders, or not. He got himself into this.

"I thought that maybe he was being forced, too," Jack says quietly. "I desperately wanted to believe Will when he had tears in his eyes and his voice was cracking while he screamed that he isn't gay, but… As I said, he leapt into Hannibal's arms. Got spun around and everything. It was hard to miss."

The agents both avert their eyes, deep in thought. They all sit there in silence for several minutes before Zeller speaks up again.

"Prurnell isn't happy with you. Or any of us."

"I imagine not."

“This is bad, Jack,” Zeller says. “First you completely disregarded all protocol to essentially kidnap Will in a foreign country, bypassed all laws regarding arrest, and now he’s escaped unofficial custody with the help of the same serial killer he helped escape under your nose less than a year ago.”

“Don’t remind me,” Jack mutters.

“Also they have Alana Bloom,” Jimmy says. “And as we know, there have been threats against her and her family by Hannibal himself.”

“So then get her wife and kid a security detail and find Alana!” Jack bellows. He shifts, searing pain shooting through both shoulders. He takes several deep breaths, praying for a nurse to come in and administer more painkillers. “What time is it, anyway?”

“After two in the morning,” Zeller tells him. “We had to sweet talk the nurses into letting us stay past visiting hours.”

“So they’ve had nearly twelve hours and nothing has turned up?”

“Agents are patrolling all the borders, airports, major highways, everything,” Zeller says, shaking his head. “They haven’t tried leaving the country, that’s for sure. I’d be surprised if they even left the state considering every police officer on the East coast knows what they look like.”

“No, they’ll have stayed close, that’s probably true,” Jack says. “We need to start looking at traffic cams, looking into the credit card statements for the accounts we’ve found thanks to Will. There will be something somewhere that they won’t expect us to find. Lecter is cocky. There will be something, I’m sure of it.”

*

It would be an understatement to say that Will is relieved when he wakes in the middle of the night to find Hannibal right beside him. As he drifted off to sleep just hours before, he was terrified he would wake up back inside that cell, pacing back and forth for hours, waiting for Hannibal to rescue him.

With Hannibal’s fingers laced with his own as the other man still sleeps, Will lets out a breath of air he thinks he’s been holding for two entire weeks. He scoots closer to Hannibal, plasters himself against his side, and kisses his neck, then his cheek, and as Hannibal stirs and opens his eyes, Will kisses his lips.

Hannibal’s movements are slow and sleepy, and the darkness makes him look so soft and vulnerable. Will kisses him again and again, soft and gentle, waiting for Hannibal to become more responsive as he slowly wakes up. Hannibal smiles at him faintly and pulls him into his arms.

“Missed you,” Will breathes, kissing Hannibal’s neck. “So much. I love you, I love you.” Each word punctuated with another kiss to Hannibal’s skin.

Several minutes pass where Hannibal just holds Will tight and kisses him back each time Will's lips pass over his mouth on his expedition to kiss every reachable inch of Hannibal's face and neck. Kissing Hannibal is the only thing he can think of doing right now, like he needs it to live. Maybe he does.

Will starts undressing him, kissing his chest once his shirt is removed, down over his soft tummy and the scar on his side from the bullet. He tugs Hannibal's pajama pants down and off, and moves back up to kiss Hannibal as he wraps a hand around his half hard cock.

Hannibal gasps as Will begins stroking him, slowly at first, then a bit faster. He pushes his own pants down with his free hand, awkwardly trying to get his own cock out without removing his hand from Hannibal's.

When his pants are around his thighs, he lines his erection up beside Hannibal's and removes his hand so he can grind down against him. He thinks this is enough—both of them moving against each other, working themselves toward their first orgasms together in two weeks; two weeks where everything was bad, and cold, and lonely. This is enough because they now feel warm and safe and so, so good. And they're together, and both of them are safe, and they love each other, and that's all enough.

Hannibal's hands move to Will's ass, squeezing once before spreading his cheeks, and pressing a finger against Will's hole. It's when Hannibal presses it in as their cocks slide together, and as the dry finger breaches him, that he decides he does, in fact, need more.

"Lube?" Will gasps. "Please tell me you have some here."

Hannibal removes his finger, and Will slows his hips down to a halt, and Hannibal rolls out from under him to open the nightstand drawer, where he pulls out a bottle of lubricant and a condom.

"Get me ready for you," Will whispers. "Then let me do the same for you."

Hannibal does get Will ready, and it's painstakingly slow.

Will lets him. He allows the gentle, exploratory touches, and the rougher, more desperate ones. Touches that make Will feel loved and cherished, and the ones that remind him that Hannibal is so scared of losing him, and that his person-suit is slipping to reveal something more wild and less calculating.

A bruising grip on his hip with the hand not working fingers inside him, pinches to his nipples, a brief squeeze to his throat, and nails down his thigh. But there's also featherlight caresses to the scar on his cheek, soft lips pressed to his forehead, a nuzzling nose to the scar across his abdomen.

The contrast of a man who is so complex to everyone who meets him. Millions of words exchanged without a single one being spoken. To Will, it's really quite simple. It's simple because all he needs to know is that Hannibal loves him and has been a wreck without him.

There are means of influence other than violence.

But Will thinks they might need both. They *like* both. He *enjoys* the roughness and the violence but he also loves the softness and the love and the tender, intimate moments.

By the time Hannibal deems Will ready, Will considers not following up on his plan to prepare Hannibal too. He considers just letting Hannibal fuck him until they both come, but then Hannibal's fingers disappear inside himself as he kneels over Will.

It's truly a sight to behold. He sits up against the headboard and watches Hannibal stretch himself with his own fingers. He watches as his husband's face changes with pleasure and emotion, his eyes shut so tight that Will can't help but think it's overwhelming for Hannibal to look at him. When Hannibal does open them, tears spring to his eyes and fall down his cheeks.

He touches Hannibal's stomach, thighs, and hips, soft where Hannibal has put on some weight since his incarceration. He knows Hannibal is insecure about that too—he was always so lean and muscular before, which always caught Will's eye, but now he's soft around the edges in ways Will loves so much. He loves Hannibal just the way he is.

Hannibal's body language is tense, though, suggesting that he's uncomfortable with this development; he doesn't want to be so vulnerable right now, and—as much as Will wishes he would just let go more often—Will won't keep him in this position.

He pulls his hands away, lays them down on the bed instead, keeping them there while Hannibal continues to get himself ready.

"Really glad you're sentimental enough to know we'd be having some sort of reunion sex, and had the foresight to get condoms, by the way," Will comments, trying to lighten the mood a bit. For Hannibal's sake. "Did you send Chiyoh out to get them or did you walk into a convenience store while the entire country is on the lookout for you?"

Hannibal holds up two fingers on the hand he isn't using to finger himself.

"Second one?" Will laughs. "Was it worth it? Risking your life and freedom while I was in prison already just so you could get laid when you broke me out?"

Hannibal nods emphatically.

"I know you say you aren't actually insane but…" Will trails off with a grin on his face.

Hannibal just rolls his eyes at the ribbing.

Will doesn't get in any more teasing because Hannibal sinks down onto him, stealing Will's breath away and robbing him of any more words. He wraps his arms around Hannibal's waist and holds him tight, barely allowing Hannibal any room to move.

Hannibal cups Will's cheeks with his hands and tilts Will's face upwards, meeting his eyes with an intensity that makes the younger man want to hide. Eye contact with Hannibal usually isn't so bad—in fact, Hannibal used to be the only person whose eyes he could meet

—but this is something else entirely. This is years of emotion and heartache and love in one gaze, all of it flooding into Will and tightening his chest uncomfortably.

He gasps for breath, and after what feels like an eternity, Hannibal lets him look away. He buries his face in Hannibal's chest, mouths at his collarbones, marking him with sucking kisses and bites. He pulls quiet noises from Hannibal who continues to rock in his lap, pulling Will closer and closer to the edge.

It's just the two of them.

At that moment, there isn't a hostage in their basement, or two accomplices down the hall. There's no FBI searching for them, and no Jack Crawford calling out orders from a hospital bed. It's just them.

No argumentative words, no misunderstandings, no bloodshed or fear.

It's just them, and they are everything.

"Close," Will gasps, unable to hold on much longer.

Hannibal stops, pulls off of him, and Will grips the base of his cock to keep himself from coming. He closes his eyes, steadying himself while Hannibal shifts around on the bed.

The night is so silent around them, save for the quiet noises they're both making. Deep, steady breaths, the sound of a condom wrapper crinkling, the cap of the lube clicking, Will's surprised gasp when Hannibal flips him over onto his stomach with strong hands and pushes into him without any sort of warning.

"Oh fuck," Will moans as Hannibal sets a desparate pace. "I won't last."

A hand smooths up and down Will's back, the other planted firmly on one of his hips. When the hand on his back disappears, it's replaced with Hannibal's weight, his broad chest against Will's back, flattening him to the bed.

Hannibal's breath is hot on his neck, and he turns his face to the side Hannibal's head is on so their lips can meet in an uncoordinated and sloppy kiss. Will can't stop the sounds that fall out of his mouth, pulled from deep within him.

He doesn't last long, not with Hannibal fucking him hard and quick, his cock hitting his prostate mercilessly as Will's own drags against the bed with every thrust.

He cries out with his release, shaking uncontrollably with the force of it. Hannibal thrusts several more times before he stills inside him, breaths ragged, his teeth sinking into Will's shoulder.

When he finally pulls out and rolls over to lay beside Will, there are tears on his face again, and Will, with tired limbs, moves to settle against his side, kissing the tears away.

"Okay?" Will asks.

Hannibal smiles at him and nods. He leans forward and presses a kiss to Will's forehead before he gets out of bed and walks over to the bathroom. He's gone for a few minutes, and Will finds himself feeling lonely. The last two weeks without Hannibal rush back to him. The pain of not knowing when he'd see him again, the cold feeling of going to sleep alone, the incessant dread in his head that kept telling him he would die in that cell.

Just as he's about to call for Hannibal, the other man comes back out of the bathroom, standing in the doorway with a ring of light around his naked body. Will sighs in relief and holds out a hand, beckoning him back to the warm safety of their bed. Even if there's a search going on for them—even if the FBI is closing in on them and could descend any moment—they have this moment, this false sense of security where everything is okay for just a little bit.

He pulls Hannibal close and pulls the covers back over them, exhausted from the good sex and the emotions that ran high through the day.

Hannibal strokes his hair, Will's head resting on his chest. It feels normal. He can almost pretend they're in their home in France, that they're somewhere a month in the past and that the last few weeks never happened. He can pretend he never put Hannibal or himself through all of this just for some petty revenge against Bedelia.

He falls asleep pretending, but the illusion doesn't last.

It's still dark when he wakes up gasping for breath from a nightmare that he can't make any sense of. He saw the cliff and he saw the cell, and he saw blood, gallons upon gallons of it, and Jack was there, and then he wasn't, and Hannibal was there, but then he wasn't. It didn't make any sense, but it didn't scare Will any less than a coherent nightmare would have.

He throws one hand out to the other side of the bed, feeling nothing but cold sheets where Hannibal should be laying.

He's alone, all alone. In his nightmare addled brain, he thinks he's back in the cell at the Baltimore Hospital for the Criminally insane. He throws his blanket off himself, and steps out of bed, meeting carpet against his bare feet rather than the cold wooden floors of the hospital. *That must be a good sign,* Will thinks to himself, still trying to catch his breath and stop his trembling body.

He finds the nightstand beside him in the dark room, and knows that's a feature not in the hospital. Another good sign.

He flicks the lamp on and sees evidence that Hannibal has been here. A journal and some pens on the nightstand, his stupid silk briefs on the floor beside the bed where Will tossed them earlier, his reading glasses beside the journal.

Maybe they really are home, Will can't help but think. Maybe he has woken up on the other side of the world in his own bed, and Hannibal is just swimming laps in their pool because that's something he likes to do some mornings.

Will stands up from where he sits on the edge of the bed and finds his own boxers. He slips them on, and finds a sweater in the closet, too large to be meant for him, and pulls it on over his bare body.

He checks the bathroom first, but Hannibal isn't there, so he leaves the bedroom and makes his way toward the stairs. The hallway isn't right, though. While the bedroom looks like theirs at home, the hallway is backwards and the paint on the walls is different.

About halfway down, he can hear Chiyoh's soft voice along with another that takes him a second longer to place. Alana, Will finally remembers.

Right. They're in America—somewhere between Baltimore and Bangor, though Will really doesn't know where.

He steps into the bright kitchen and finds Chiyoh, Hannibal, and Alana standing around the counter. Alana and Chiyoh have their backs to the door, but Hannibal is facing the doorway, seemingly waiting for Will's arrival. Hannibal is cooking something on the stove, and Will has to squint against the bright lights to even attempt to see. What he does see is Hannibal's smile, directed at him.

Alana and Chiyoh turn to glance at him, but ultimately ignore his presence. Hannibal waves him over and grabs a plate from the counter. He scoops the scrambled eggs from the pan onto the plate and hands them to Will as soon as he's close enough.

"Thanks," Will murmurs, pressing a kiss to Hannibal's stubbled jaw.

Will didn't realize how hungry he is until now, or how much he's missed Hannibal's cooking. There's sausage and peppers mixed into the eggs, just like their first breakfast together. Will notices that Alana and Chiyoh aren't eating anything, and Will wonders who Hannibal killed for this meal. He doesn't ask.

He stands close to Hannibal, arm brushing against one of his as he eats. Hannibal fills a plate for himself and they eat side by side while Alana fills Will in on what they were talking about before he came into the kitchen.

"They're putting a security detail on my family," she explains. "I think Margot can only hold out so long without offering our resources to find me before it begins to look suspicious. If it doesn't already. And she *will* find me, there's no question about it. As soon as she gets involved, it may be over. She knows she needs to hold out as long as possible, but the FBI is going to start pushing her as soon as the initial stress settles."

"So we need to get out of here," Will sighs. "Right. What about you?"

"Hannibal needs to hurt me," Alana says bluntly. "He needs to carve me open in a way that could kill me, but won't. Like he did with you."

Will suddenly feels cold. He wouldn't wish that on anyone, especially not Alana.

“And you’ll need to be fast,” Alana continues. “I won’t allow myself to fully bleed out, but I can give you a headstart before I call an ambulance.”

“How long do you think we have?” Will asks.

“It’s nearly five,” Alana shrugs. “I would expect we should get moving no later than eight.”

“I don’t think you should continue north,” Chiyoh says after a moment. “They’ll be at Molly’s house without a doubt.”

Hannibal signs something to her that Will can’t catch in time.

“Are you *sure* there aren’t any more safe houses south of here?” Chiyoh asks, and Will gives her a grateful look for repeating what Hannibal must have said. Hannibal gives a helpless shrug. Chiyoh sighs, “What about the cliff house? They won’t put their personnel out searching somewhere that would be stupid for you to return to.”

Will shakes his head. “There has to be another option.”

“No matter where you go, the FBI will be on your tail,” Alana points out. “Consider the easiest escape route.”

“I can have a boat ready,” Chiyoh offers. “I can leave ahead of you all, but whatever you’re planning on doing with Bedelia… you have some decisions to make.”

She looks at Hannibal when she says this, not even sparing a glance at Will. Will knows he’s not the one making any more decisions for this. He made Hannibal push the date up, and he got them into this mess.

Hannibal places a hand over his and squeezes, and Will realizes he’s been clenching his fist.

Will sets his fork down on his plate and takes a deep breath.

“Can I talk to you?” Will whispers, turning to address Hannibal.

With a nod, Hannibal leads Will out of the kitchen and back up the stairs to the bedroom they recently occupied. Will sits on the edge of the bed, and pats the spot next to him for Hannibal to sit.

“I’m terrified,” Will admits. “Really. I have an awful feeling we aren’t going to get out of this alive.”

Hannibal lifts a hand to cup Will’s cheek, presses a kiss to his forehead, then pulls him into a tight embrace.

“What if they already have people at the house? What if they know we’ll go there? Hannibal we’re going to be surrounded. No matter which way we go, someone is going to see us,” Will continues. “I know I got us into this, but if they see you, they’ll kill you on site. I think you need to go. Disguise yourself, get out of the country. It’ll be easier if it’s just you. Get somewhere safe and I’ll take care of myself.”

Hannibal shakes his head vigorously and squeezes Will tighter.

“Please,” Will whispers. “Please. I can’t let them kill you.”

Hannibal keeps shaking his head, *no, no, no,* and it’s breaking Will’s heart.

He doesn’t want to be separated either—he *swore* they never would be ever again—but it feels like the only option. Will can create a diversion, he can lead the FBI away, and he can find Hannibal later. He can get himself out of prison again, he can lie his way through a trial to convince them he’s been trying to create trust between them so he could get Hannibal arrested. He can flip the story around and once he’s free again, he’ll find Hannibal.

He says all of this, his hands clutching the back of Hannibal’s shirt, rocking him gently back and forth when Hannibal begins to cry in his arms. He soothes him, tells him it will all be okay.

“We’ll find each other, we will,” Will promises. “We’ll find each other.”

Over and over, he says it. He whispers declarations of love and he whispers apologies.

“It’ll be okay,” Will promises him, even if he’s not entirely sure he can keep the promise. As much as he wants to, he knows there’s too many factors.

Eventually they stand up and leave the bedroom hand in hand. Back in the kitchen, Will goes over a new plan with Alana and Chiyoh, deciding he’ll take Alana and pretend they escaped from Hannibal, while Hannibal escapes himself. During this, Hannibal goes downstairs to the basement, likely to make arrangements for Bedelia.

When he comes back upstairs, Will is still recounting all the things he said to Hannibal in the bedroom just a few minutes ago.

Will doesn’t get through explaining the entire plan to her before Hannibal steps up behind him and the sharp prick of a syringe in his neck makes everything go away.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Last chapter before a short epilogue in a few days. Please leave comments!!

Will wakes up in a room he's seen only once before. It was months ago, and just briefly, to change into different clothes while they waited for Dolarhyde. Through the windows, he sees that it's sometime around midday, and the light makes his head pound worse than it already is. He covers his face with his hands and lets out a pained groan. His body is still fighting off whatever Hannibal injected him with, but he forces himself to rollover and sit on the edge of the bed.

His first thought, as he sits up and fumbles for his glasses on the nightstand, is that he needs some water to combat his dry mouth. His second thought, as he finds his glasses folded nicely on the nightstand and slides them on, is that he's going to kill Hannibal.

He goes into the en-suite first to fill his cupped hands with water from the sink. He takes several gulps then runs a wet hand through his long, unruly hair.

In the mirror he sees bruises on his neck. All of them could be love bites from earlier, but he has a feeling one of them was caused by the syringe Hannibal injected him with. He sighs, grips the edge of the counter, and considers his next moves.

He can't really kill Hannibal, he knows that. But he may yell at him. He wants to hit him, if he's being honest, but that's not very healthy. Not that Will is under any illusion that their relationship is healthy to begin with, but he'll leave the physical fighting out of it this time.

Truthfully he feels too awful to even consider going up against Hannibal. He hopes it wears off soon because if it doesn't, he has no idea if he would be able to keep up with whatever plan is being put in motion now.

He looks down at himself and realizes he's only in a clean pair of underwear and a clean t-shirt. Hannibal undressed him and changed his clothes before tucking him into bed and setting his glasses on the nightstand for him. He feels a fond warmth spread through his chest and can't help the smile that tugs at the corner of his lips.

Shaking his head, he forces the feeling out of him, reminding himself that he's furious at Hannibal and why. Part of him wonders if the injection included something that could take away his ability to hate Hannibal because he's having a really hard time keeping that mindset. If anyone could come up with something like that, it would be the resident narcissist in Will's life, that's certain.

He leaves the bathroom, and then the bedroom.

He expects to find Hannibal packing up supplies—though he doesn't know how stocked the house could possibly be after the FBI no doubt combed through every single fiber after they killed Dolarhyde. He's surprised Hannibal still has ownership of the house in some way. Maybe he doesn't. Maybe he killed whoever moved in so they could have their escape.

What he doesn't expect is to walk past the dining room and stop short at the sight of Bedelia sitting at the head of a long, wooden table. Upon first glance, Will sees that she's in an elegant evening gown; deep navy blue, a slit on one side to reveal that she's missing a leg. Beside her is an IV stand, and he can tell by the way she slowly turns her head to look at him with vacant eyes that she has enough painkillers in her to take down a horse.

As he stands there, dumbstruck by the sight, he feels a presence behind him. Hannibal walked up behind him so quietly that the only reason Will knows he's there is because of his cologne.

Will turns just as slowly as Bedelia had, but instead of him being drugged to the gills, he's simply stalling for time—trying to use the few extra seconds to decide what he's going to say.

The sight of Hannibal makes him forget it, anyway.

He's in a dark maroon suit, cut and tailored perfectly to fit his body. His hair is swept back, away from his face, the long locks tucked behind his ears and gelled in place. There's a hint of amusement on his infuriatingly beautiful face. His eyes are soft and warm as he looks at Will.

Will wants to kiss him and punch him at the same time. He wants to say how angry he is, he wants to throw some cutting insults at Hannibal, he wants to accuse him of not loving him or trusting him.

"I'm feeling severely underdressed," is what comes out of Will's mouth.

Hannibal's amused smile becomes even more obvious and he gestures with his head in the direction of the bedrooms down the hall. Will releases an irritated sigh, but follows Hannibal down the hall to the very last bedroom. It's not the one Will was sleeping in—which Will has come to realize was meant for him nearly six years ago when Hannibal planned their escape the first time—but the master bedroom, instead.

"You're fucking insane," Will says as soon as the door shuts behind them. He puts as much venom into his words as possible, pushes Hannibal's chest in his rekindled anger.

Hannibal just grins at him, not at all taking Will seriously. Will's frustration bubbles up until he can't contain it anymore. He releases an anguished groan, forcing himself closer into Hannibal's space, fisting his hands in Hannibal's pristine shirt. He wants to shake him, he wants to hit him, he wants to make him understand and he wants to make him *hurt.* He wants to feel like an equal and he feels like violence is the only way to show Hannibal he's on the same level as him.

Will pushes him again, and Hannibal just wraps his hands around his wrists and holds his hands there, right on Hannibal's chest. Hannibal leans forward and kisses Will's forehead, and momentarily, Will thinks about biting him—ripping a chunk out of his face and spitting it out just like he did to Cordell. He thinks Hannibal would just smile even wider if he did, so he doesn't.

"You're so completely stupid!" Will yells. "This is the worst idea you've had in years. This is astronomically unsafe, and is a risk *completely* out of character for you!"

Hannibal shrugs and lets go of Will's wrists. He goes over to the closet, still full of Hannibal's own clothes, which means whoever investigated the scene before didn't take any of his things if they were evidence—which means Hannibal still owns the house under whatever alias he owns it under, and maybe the FBI knows that, which means this is so, so, so unsafe.

Will can't breathe. He gasps and heaves, and leans against the wall, his knees feeling weak and his head spinning worse than it was from just the drugs leaving his system. He slowly slides down the wall to the floor and puts his face in his hands. The room closes in on him, and he doesn't know up from down or anything beyond the carpet beneath his bare feet and the cold wall through the thin t-shirt he has on.

"We're going to die," Will gasps. "Oh my god. They're going to kill you and they're going to arrest me or kill me too, and I don't know which is worse. I don't—"

Hannibal kneels beside him, making soft shushing noises into his hair. Will realizes Hannibal's arms are wrapped tight around him, rocking him gently. Just as Will had done for him back at the house before Hannibal shoved a syringe into his neck and knocked him out—which Will honestly thought was just something from the movies, but no. Hannibal, honest to god, made him drop to the goddamn floor within seconds of the drugs hitting a blood vessel. Jesus fucking Christ.

Will tries to compose himself, but he really can't. Instead, he just pushes Hannibal off of him and flees from the room. He goes out through the door, and sees the large window the Dolarhyde shot through has been repaired, and he really wishes he knew more about how this house is back to normal, rather than still being a crime scene, but he ignores the thought.

Outside, the chilly air surrounds him, forcing him back into the present, and making him focus on that instead of the fact that they may be minutes away from dying. The patio outside is rough against his bare feet and he hobbles over to the edge of the cliff, and just… looks. Out to the sea. Out to the sea where they almost died and Hannibal almost didn't make it back to him. The sea where Hannibal's voice was lost and never returned from.

He looks down and wonders how it's possible they survived at all. Bleeding out and exhausted, and yet they still survived. They survived when it seemed like it wouldn't. Will wonders if that's why Hannibal brought them back here—a place where it seemed like they would die, but lived. Now, Will wonders if the same will happen. Hannibal may think this place is symbolic for that reason. That the way it saved them before will happen once again.

A coat is set over his shoulders, and Will pulls it around him. He allows himself to melt back into Hannibal's body, allowing Hannibal to hold him around the waist.

"Is it even worth it at this point?" Will asks.

Hannibal stiffens behind him, tightens his arms so Will can't get out of them, and moves them back away from the cliff edge. Will can't help but laugh. Hannibal misinterpreted his words, seeming to think the 'it' Will is referring to is *living.*

"I meant killing Bedelia," he amends. "I wasn't going to throw us off the cliff, Hannibal. Besides, we'd survive again, anyway. It would hardly be another suicide attempt."

Hannibal's tense stance softens again, and his arms around Will's waist loosen again to a gentle embrace, rather than something to prevent him from leaping.

"We could just run," Will suggests. "Leave her where she is… she's already missing a leg, she's on tons of drugs, she won't be able to follow us for a long time. We can leave it all behind, and just go."

Hannibal nods, his face buried in Will's neck. His hands leave Will's body and he pulls something out of a pocket, still standing close behind Will. Will reads the slip of paper that says, 'Come get dressed and then we'll eat,' and Will figures they might as well. They may not have much time, but he knows he shouldn't go on the run barefoot, bare legged, and on an empty stomach.

"I should be so angry with you," Will says as they walk back into the house. "Is it bad that I'm not? I'm just… tired of fighting, and even if I don't agree with what you did, and if you do it again, I *will* kill you, but I understand why you think you had to do it. And when it comes to you," Will pauses, shrugging. He shakes his head. "If you think it's right, there's no arguing, I know that."

Hannibal turns and gives him a slight frown, as if he disagrees somewhat but would never try to argue.

Will allows himself to be steered back into the bedroom and toward the closet again where Hannibal pulls out a suit that compliments his own. He quickly changes into it and allows Hannibal to tie the tie for him, his hands lingering on Will's neck after it's been tied. Will leans forward and kisses him softly on the lips.

Hannibal has been forgiven for the drugging, for undermining Will's plan, and for bringing them here despite every risk they now face. It's been done, and getting angry will only hinder them even more—Will losing his head could be the difference between life or death should someone find them before they escape.

He closes his eyes and they rest their foreheads together, breathing against each other's faces until a timer in the kitchen goes off. Hannibal drops his hands to his sides, kisses Will once more, then turns and leaves the bedroom.

Will slips on the dress shoes Hannibal set out for him. He wonders if he would be able to run in them should the need arise. He hopes Hannibal has a pair of tennis shoes for him somewhere just in case.

He leaves the bedroom and decides to go right into the dining room to sit down, watching Bedelia's head sway and her eyes flutter shut, as if she's just on the edge of falling asleep but knows she needs to stay awake. He can't help but smile, knowing he's finally *won.*

He pours himself some wine, then gets up and pours some for Bedelia, too. His presence seems to have made her force herself into alertness because she sits up a bit straighter and blinks several times. Her movements are slow when she picks up her glass to take a sip, and Will briefly wonders if the alcohol mixed with all the drugs in her system will be what kills her.

Sitting back down at his place at the table, Will is in much higher spirits. He looks over at Bedelia and grins, and she gives a half-hearted, sardonic smile in return.

Hannibal comes in carrying a large tray with the entirety of Bedelia's leg sitting atop it.

"What is that, Hannibal?" Will asks, playfully, craning his head to see it. "Veal?"

Hannibal smiles at him and sets the tray down.

"Get it, love?" Will asks. "Because… Veal is *calves.* And calves—"

"We get it," Bedelia says, irritated. "You aren't funny, Mister Graham."

Hannibal is looking between the two of them as he begins to carve into the meat. The amusement is evident on his face and that is enough for Will.

Will is served first, but he waits for Hannibal to serve Bedelia and himself before he takes a bite.

"Oh, Hannibal," Will says wistfully after he swallows the first bite. "This is simply to die for. Don't you think, Bedelia?"

"You'll find out soon enough," Bedelia says. "He'll get bored of you and force you to eat yourself, as well. You can feel as special as you want now, but it will all come to an end for you eventually. Just as it has for everyone else that shared his bed. Did paramedics reach Doctor Bloom in time to save her after you splattered her blood all across the kitchen and left a trail of intestines down the hall, I wonder?"

Will looks over at Hannibal who is staring down at his plate. Will continues to eat his dinner, serving himself the side dishes Hannibal also prepared—it's making him feel better to eat. He feels his lingering panic completely wash away, and having food in his system helps with the effects of the drugs. It helps him ignore Bedelia's words and pretend none of them bother him. As if he doesn't care about Alana Bloom's fate, even if he very much does care. Even if he very much wishes that what Bedelia said is not true.

“Oh, you didn’t see what he did to her, did you?” Bedelia continues. “No, I suppose you were sedated to make you more manageable. Tell me, does Hannibal sedate, tie up, and gag you often? Or is that just a special treat for when he’s bored of his other option which is to gut you and leave you bleeding on the kitchen floor?”

Will just stares at her. He can’t bring himself to answer. He doesn’t want to relive that night again. He doesn’t want to think about that night, and he doesn’t want to think that Hannibal would ever consider a repeat of it. He doesn’t want to think that could have been one of Hannibal’s options instead of the syringe.

“I suppose since you survived that once, he has decided that keeping you is the only way he can keep you from bringing the FBI to his doorstep, isn’t it? He doesn’t trust you, even after all this time. It was you who I saw, afterall. You’re the one that couldn’t keep yourself hidden, and you who got yourself arrested,” Bedelia goes on. “I have to wonder… did you do it on purpose? Did you intend to lure Hannibal to his own arrest?”

Will doesn’t answer her, and instead stands up from his seat. He picks up his knife and just as he’s about to stalk over to Bedelia, a set of arms wrap around his waist and hold him back.

“Let me go!” Will yells, trying to wrench himself out of Hannibal’s grasp. He briefly considers using the knife on him, (nothing too serious, just a knick to the arm that’ll loosen his grip), but knows that will never work—and Hannibal might see it as an indicator that Bedelia’s words are true.

Instead, he slumps against his chest, and allows Hannibal to drag him out of the dining room.

One arm still secured around Will’s waist, Hannibal gently pulls the knife out of Will’s hand and sets it on a table in the hallway. He lifts Will’s left hand, thumbing at the band on his ring finger. Will suddenly remembers.

“Where’s mine?” he asks. “My real one.”

Hannibal sighs behind him and kisses his neck. His arm tightens around Will’s waist, and his body is stiff like he doesn’t want to admit something.

“You don’t have it, do you?” Will asks. “Where is it?”

Hannibal shrugs behind him, but Will knows he can see the image of the last place he left the ring clearly in his mind. It’s somewhere he doesn’t want to say—it’s been left somewhere because Hannibal *forgot* about it. And the only reason it would have been out of Hannibal’s sight is if it was set somewhere, and they have to leave in a hurry. If it were left in a pocket of quickly discarded pants or set in a nightstand drawer for safe keeping. If Hannibal had other things on his mind.

“Hannibal, if it’s back at the other house… the inscription will lead them right here,” Will says slowly. “Jack will tell them to look for *anything* that could be a hint—and even if you didn’t mean for it to be one, Jack is going to get a report, or a call from an agent, asking if the date means anything, and he’s going to think—he’s going to send them right here. He thinks you’re cocky enough to leave something like that. I heard him say it a million times before I

followed you to Florence… We—we need to go. Now, Hannibal. We may be out of time already."

Hannibal shushes him, as if to soothe him, but Will isn't having it.

"This isn't me freaking out, Hannibal! This is me making the most logical decision based on the fact that I worked for the FBI finding people like us for *years!* I was a police officer for even longer! We need to go!" Will yells. "And I'm killing her right now."

Will pulls himself from Hannibal's grip and picks up the knife again.

He's in front of Bedelia, ready to strike, when he feels himself being stabbed in the abdomen. He looks down and sees a fork sticking out of his side, just below his ribs. He wonders where she meant to get him because it couldn't have been there. In his distraction, a knife comes toward him, just barely missing his femoral artery as it impales his thigh.

He slits her throat.

It may be the most anticlimactic way for her to die, Will thinks. She deserves hours of torture, physical and psychological. She deserves to know exactly how Will feels about her, and all the things she took from him and taunted him about. She deserves all of that, but she doesn't deserve Will's time. Especially when Will knows he may have so little of it left.

Which is exactly why he does it this way. Whether she deserves the long drawn out death he would love to force her to endure, Will just can't be bothered to waste any more time on this woman.

He feels the spray of her blood on his face and hands. He feels his own blood leaking down his leg, and he stumbles backwards. Back into a firm chest as steady hands find his wounds. Will had pulled the fork out at some point, but he really doesn't remember it. The knife is still lodged in his thigh and the pain catches up to him when Hannibal pushes everything off the table and lays Will down atop it. He quickly cuts open Will's pants leg and pushes his shirt up to assess the damage, and Will lets him.

Will thinks he might scream as Hannibal tends to the wounds. He very nearly slips out of consciousness and wonders if she did get his femoral artery after all. He wonders if he's currently bleeding to death on this thick wooden table as Hannibal's hands reach out for various items. Will doesn't even know where the medical supplies came from. Maybe they were in the room all along, maybe Hannibal ran from the room and found them elsewhere. Will can't even pretend to be aware of anything but the pain.

He doesn't know how long he lays on that table with his own blood and Bedelia's pooling around him. His vision swims and he can see Hannibal has removed half of his suit, dressed in only his shirt and pants now. Will can see, when he lifts his head, Hannibal's belt around his thigh like a tourniquet. Hannibal's hands are bloody as he stitches it. Will thinks he feels a tug as he watches each pass of the needle go through, but nothing else. Hannibal must have used a local anesthetic while Will wasn't paying any attention.

He lays back down flat on the table and waits for Hannibal to be done.

Hannibal hands him something to eat and a bottle of water, which Will forces down before laying back down again. He stares up at the ceiling, sees a splatter of blood up there, and focuses on that. He feels hands smoothing down his shirt, and tugging his pants off the rest of the way.

“Will.”

“Huh?” Will tries to focus his eyes again, seeing Hannibal swim into view above him.

“W-we—” Hannibal stutters. His mouth snaps shut and he takes a deep breath.

Will can tell this is hard for him. He knows it is. He doesn’t know what Hannibal’s trying to say, though. Usually he can read him, but now it’s impossible. He can barely think straight on his own, and now Hannibal’s own stress and his attempts to push it away is making it impossible to know what needs to be done.

A phone rings somewhere, then stops. Will realizes Hannibal has answered it and pushes himself up. He can hear barely Chiyoh’s voice through the speaker and reaches for Hannibal to come closer.

“I spotted a FBI SUV,” Chiyoh is saying. “They’re going in the direction of the house. You’ll never make it to the dock in time.”

“We have to go,” Will says, trying to get off the table. He forces himself to stand on his leg despite the excruciating pain. He sways with light headedness, and Hannibal reaches out to grab his elbow, steadying him. “We have to try.”

“The only way here is through the road they’ll have to drive down, Will,” Chiyoh tells him.

Will pulls Hannibal by one hand, limping through the hallway. He looks down and sees he’s back down to just his underwear and dress shirt—no pants, no shoes, no jacket or tie.

“Not the only way,” Will says, gritting his teeth against the pain. “How quickly do you think you could get the boat as close to the cliff as possible?”

“You’re not thinking of jumping again, are you?” Chiyoh asks. “Hannibal texted me that you’re hurt.”

“Not as bad as last time,” Will says. “Get here.”

Will hangs up the phone and slides it back into Hannibal’s pocket.

“I hope all the supplies we need are on the boat,” Will says.

Hannibal just nods, letting himself be dragged out of the house by Will.

Will ignores the pain he feels, ignores the rocks underneath his feet as he walks barefoot toward the cliff edge. He sees a speed boat in the distance heading toward them—it’s nothing like the spacious sailboat they escaped in last time, but this one will get them somewhere quicker.

They stand on the cliff, overlooking the edge into the water. Will turns at the sound of a car and sees not one, but three coming down the long drive through the trees. They're running out of time.

"Listen to me, Hannibal," Will says, lifting both hands to cup his cheeks. "We've done this once before. We survived. We got out, and we can do it again. But we can't let go this time, okay? We have to hold on to each other."

Hannibal nods, kisses Will with the passion of someone who may never see his lover again, and wraps his arms tightly around Will's waist. Will loops his own around Hannibal's neck. He won't let go this time. He won't let Hannibal go through that again—the thing they both have nightmares about. They won't be separated when they hit the water, not like last time.

He hears the sound of a dog barking and a car door slamming. Shouts and pounding on the front door. They're out of time.

Will looks down over the edge again, into the ocean. He knows it's going to hurt, both the impact and the salty water in their eyes and his own wounds. There could be months of recovery ahead if they hit the water wrong and break bones. They *could* die, truth be told.

But Will can't risk not trying. He wouldn't be able to live with himself if they were arrested without even trying to get away. He wouldn't be able to live if Hannibal were killed by the agents swarming the house. He wouldn't be able to live if either of them were confined to separate cells, or sentenced to death.

The idea of dying in the ocean where their new life together started is more acceptable to Will than any of those other options.

He just hopes it doesn't come to any of that.

He pulls his weight and Hannibal's toward the edge. He holds as tight as he can, and can't help but think of the same act being performed for different reasons entirely—the first time, he was certain they would both die when he pulled them over. As they plummutted that time, he realized he didn't *want* to die. This time, he's pulling them over so they can have a chance to survive again. Into the ocean where they left pieces of themselves behind.

The sound of shouting officers telling them to step away from each other and put their hands up could be heard if Will cared to listen. Instead, he only cares about his tight hold on Hannibal's neck, and the tight hold around his waist. He whispers in Hannibal's ear.

"I love you."

Hannibal nods into Will's neck, mouthing the words into his skin in a silent declaration.

Will drags Hannibal over, hoping they'll find everything they've lost. Knowing they have even more to lose this time than last time. Knowing that everything they've gained between these two points in time on the same cliff edge, overlooking the same sea, could be lost in mere moments. At least they'll be doing it together.

When the earth no longer holds them aloft, Will squeezes just a little bit tighter and feels Hannibal do the same.

They fall.

epilogue

Chapter Notes

> Very short epilogue to wrap things up. Chapter 16 was uploaded a just few days ago so make sure you read it first.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal's voice was left in the ocean all those months ago, the first time Will took them over the cliff. Screaming himself hoarse trying to reach Will again, almost losing him, almost dying because Will couldn't live with his choices. The fall was that final push; it unraveled the final thread that held Hannibal's carefully curated person-suit together.

It froze his words in his throat and choked him up, and his voice never did find it's way back out. Not completely. Not even when they went back with hopes to find it, to reclaim what the ocean took from them. When they soared off that cliff with arms wrapped tightly around each other, by mutual choice this time, not daring to let go because they love each other and *knew* it was the way to survive. Not even then does Hannibal find what he lost.

Because some things just aren't symbolic.

Some things are results of years and years of battles inside one's brain. Pushing things down and away until something shifts and something *breaks.* And this time, Hannibal is the one falling victim to that. Because after years of not feeling, of compartmentalizing and trying to keep every emotion under the surface, something had to give. Something changed.

And that's okay.

Will tells Hannibal every day that's okay.

And there are days when Hannibal speaks a few words, or a handful of sentences, or sometimes he talks from morning until night, sometimes he can talk but only over the phone, or when he isn't looking at his conversation partner. There are also days, weeks, *months* where he doesn't speak a single word. *Can't.*

Because recovery isn't just point A to point B. It's not just here to another place over there. It's point A to B to C to D and back to A then nothing at all and the metaphor falls apart because it's not one single route, and doesn't follow the rules anybody wants it to follow.

Hannibal is trying to accept that, and Will is trying to help him accept that.

They're working on it. That's all they can ask of themselves and each other.

They survived their second fall from that cliff, they didn't let go of each other when they hit the water, and they were able to swim to the boat. They managed to get away before the agent that saw them go over could even reach for their cellphone to call it in.

Chiyoh took them North, where Molly met them with the dogs in Newfoundland, where Hannibal had a customs officer who is apparently on his neverending list of people who owe him favors. They switched boats, they got new documents, they stayed a few days on the island to lay low while Will recovered from his injuries. They received word from Margot that Alana survived all of her own injuries—none of them as gruesome as Bedelia tried to tell Will they were—and that no one would come looking for them if they promised to mind their own business from here on out.

They decided that it's a pretty good deal as long as Alana can keep up her end of it.

Hannibal didn't speak an entire word that entire time they were in Canada, and neither did Will, truth be told. There was nothing for him to say in this situation, other than telling Hannibal that he loves him as many times a day as he can.

Now, they're living outside of Havana, Cuba, having sailed down, just the two of them, the moment Will was up for the trip. Chiyoh has affairs to take care of in Europe—selling their old shop and gathering last items from the house to mail them—but Will thinks even when that's done, she might not come back to them. He doesn't have confirmation, but he thinks Hannibal told her to go off and live her life—they would be fine on their own.

And that's the thing. They *are* just fine on their own. Even if Chiyoh was a godsend after their first escape, even if she took care of them for months and kept them from killing each other just as much, Will knows they'll continue to be just fine on their own.

The warm weather and sunshine does wonderful things for Hannibal, and Will never gets tired of his bright smile against his tan skin, or the way water rolls down the body he seldom covers these days, or the way Hannibal lounges on their boat deck while Will fishes as if he doesn't have a care in the world. Will imagines he likely doesn't. Will knows this is the happiest he's ever been himself.

Even if Hannibal still isn't really talking to him. Because they just get each other. Even Will relays what he's thinking without saying any words because they've become so attuned with each other. In ways Will would have laughed at if Hannibal suggested, years ago, that it would be like this.

Happy and carefree. Alive and in love.

It's almost a year after their escape when Hannibal presents him with a gift.

Will smiles as Hannibal brings him a flute of champagne as he sits on their balcony.

"Are we celebrating something?" Will asks, regarding the glass. He takes a sip and looks up to see Hannibal doing the same.

The older man sets his own glass down on the table beside Will's chair, and drapes himself in Will's lap. Will accepts his soft kiss with a joyful laugh, and pushes Hannibal's hair away from his eyes when they pull away.

Hannibal, in the hand that wasn't carrying both of their champagne flutes, carries a manila envelope.

"What's this?" Will asks, setting his glass down on the table beside him then reaching for the envelope.

Hannibal passes it to him, and Will sees it's addressed to their aliases and there's no return address on it. He opens the top and pulls out a piece of paper.

A marriage certificate.

With their real names.

"Is this real?" Will asks. "We didn't even have a ceremony! When did I sign a marriage license?"

Hannibal kisses his cheek and points toward the beach outside their house.

"In the ocean?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods.

"Fucking—you had me sign a marriage certificate when I wasn't even cognizant after being *stabbed* and jumping off a *cliff,* didn't you?" Will sighs. "I'm not sure what I expected. You know you could've asked before you gave me all those painkillers, I would've just done it. I would've liked to remember this."

Hannibal signs the word *surprise,* and Will laughs.

"Yeah, yeah," Will says, waving him off. "I get it. Normally the surprise is just the proposal, not the entire marriage. We've been married for a year!?"

Hannibal shakes his head.

"No, I suppose this just came in the mail, didn't it. I had to be divorced before that could work, and I'm assuming you had me sign divorce papers from Molly too, didn't you?"

Will feels Hannibal's smile against his cheek.

"You are so unbelievable," Will laughs. "I'm guessing you had some government official that owed you a favor and got all of this officialized. Who did they kill and why do you keep hiding bodies for everyone? You didn't do that for me when I thought I killed Abigail!"

Hannibal gives him an innocent smile, then buries his face in Will's neck.

"I love you," Hannibal whispers into his throat.

Hannibal tries to tell Will he loves him as often as he can, even if he can't get more words to come out. It's like that's the one thing he's sure will be met with a response he can bear. Some days he says more, some days he says nothing, but most days he says that he loves Will.

"Mhm, love you too," Will says. "But don't think you can hide your face in my neck pretending to be ashamed about what you did when I know you aren't!"

Hannibal laughs silently.

"You're a freak," Will adds. "Truly, Hannibal. Only a complete lunatic would drug someone up to get them to sign their divorce papers and a marriage license on the same day."

Hannibal gives him a look that could almost be considered a pout if Hannibal Lecter was the type of man to pout. Will laughs and kisses his protruding bottom lip, then nips it with his teeth. Hannibal snaps his teeth back, playfully.

"Yes, but you're *my* lunatic, don't worry," Will promises. "And if you make me sign a divorce paper ever again, I hope you know it'll be the last thing you do."

Hannibal bites his neck lightly, then pulls away to pick up both of their champagne flutes again. They kiss again, and again, enjoying their time together.

When they went off the cliff for the second time, Will had thought they might not survive it. He decided that if he was going to die, he was going to do it wrapped in Hannibal's arms.

As he takes a sip of his champagne and wraps an arm tightly around Hannibal's waist, savoring the feeling of his *husband* sitting in his lap, he can't believe he ever thought he would be okay with dying. The first time when he meant to, and the second time when it had crossed his mind that they might—he's glad that they didn't.

The choices he's made between the day he met Hannibal and now were questionable at times. He made mistakes and people died because of him, or people went to prison because of him, or became maimed beyond recognition because of him. He looks back on those, and wonders if it was all necessary. Maybe not. Maybe he could have saved Abigail, maybe he didn't have to kill Bedelia, maybe he didn't have to send the Dragon after Chilton, or marry Molly just to break her heart. Maybe he didn't have to send Hannibal away to prison, or betray him long before then.

Maybe he could have done everything entirely differently.

But it all led here.

And the one choice Will never questions is the choice to stay.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the end. This is likely going to be my last Hannibal fic for a while, unfortunately. I have a few documents that didn't really go anywhere that I may or may not finish up one day, but I suppose time will tell.

If you've enjoyed this, I really hope you'll consider sharing it—I don't have much presence in the Hannibal fandom anymore, so it would mean a lot to get this to a wider audience than I can reach myself.

Let me know what you've thought. I deliberately made some choices in this fic that felt like risks, and that some people didn't quite agree with (for example, the way I explored Will questioning his sexuality). I also know that some people might be disappointed that Hannibal never gets his voice back entirely—I did this because I didn't want it to seem like it's only there as a plot conflict that needed to be solved. This fic was more about exploring a dynamic rather than solving any sort of "problems." I hope this doesn't take away from anyones enjoyment of the story. If it does, then… I guess I can't really help you. But! If you did enjoy it, please leave me a comment and let me know.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!